

# A SENSE OF SPACE

The Gardens of Jan Blok



Text Lindsay Gray

Photography Kim Thunder





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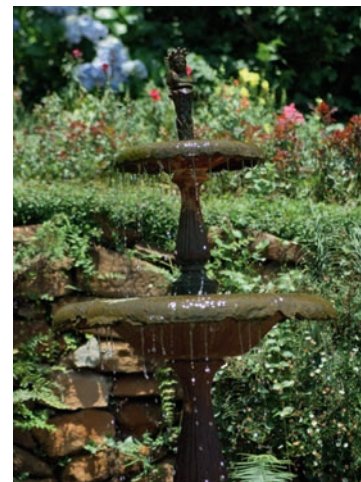
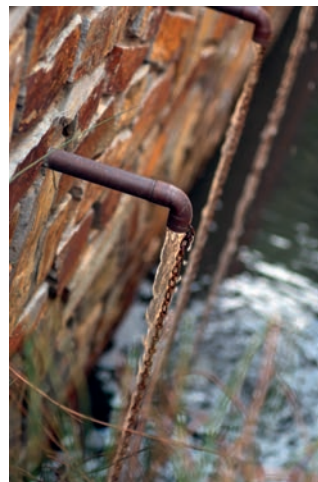
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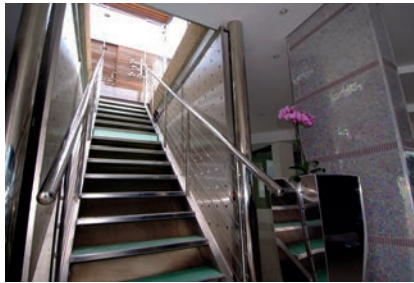
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# Introduction

I have always had a passion for design, not only in gardens, but any form of design. I was first introduced to landscaping as a young student when I attended a presentation on the landscaped gardens of the then brand-new Cascades Hotel at Sun City. This was one of the first hotels of its kind with the largest landscaping project undertaken in South Africa. Inspired by what I saw, I knew what career I wanted to follow.

You will find that the gardens showcased in this book have been divided up into ‘spaces’. One of my garden philosophies is that ‘if you can see the entire garden from one point, you won’t walk in it’. Good design isn’t a mere fashion statement or a following of current fads; it is timeless.

My gardens are all about geometry and symmetry. The structure of a garden, in relation to the architecture of the home, is important to me. It is not an element that you would necessarily find in nature. Often, when art tries to imitate nature, it falls short because no one can ever truly simulate God’s creation and His attention to detail. All of the gardens in this book have a similar design thread and ethos, whether the focus is more on the traditional or the contemporary, or even a small or large space. The prevailing sense of symmetry and geometry can be clearly seen in the gardens I create; this design trait has come to be known as my signature style.

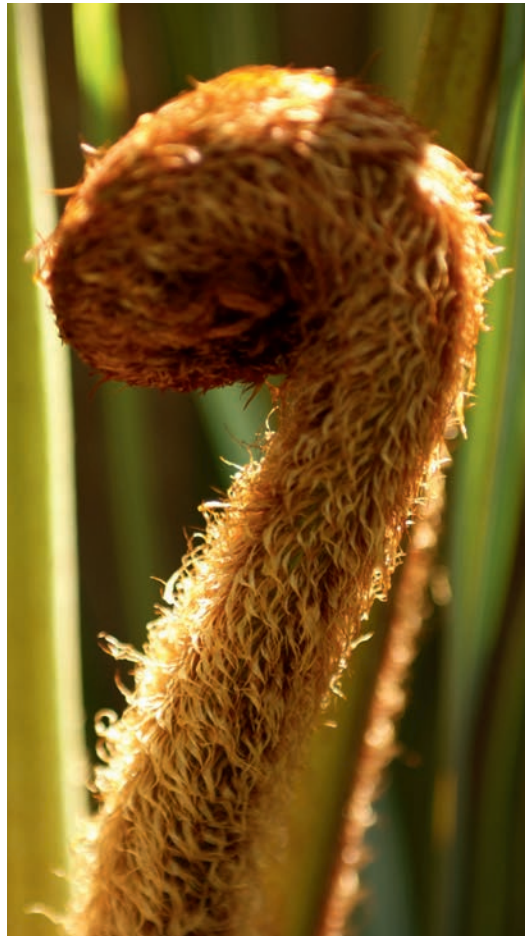
A highlight for me during the process of this book were the visits to my older gardens, some of which were designed more than ten years ago. I now realise, more than ever, just how much gardening is a discipline in patience. Seeing how essential plants had matured and materials had softened into the landscape was a very rewarding experience. It also emphasises the point that gardens, unlike interior décor, actually improve with age. To me, plants are merely accessories to the garden’s overall layout. By changing other aspects such as ornamentation, construction materials and specific plant species, a traditional garden can become contemporary.

I met Lindsay Gray while I was landscaping Camp Orchards at the beginning of my career. Lindsay approached me to do a series of talks at her garden design school. Our relationship evolved, as did our careers, and, at various stages, the topic of a book arose. It was not until years later, while working on a project in Switzerland, where I had been commissioned by my client to do the garden as well as the interior of the home, that the idea resurfaced. I had asked a close family friend, Kim Thunder, for an image to use in the main entrance area of the interior, which he duly provided. I then came up with a panelled wall design featuring my client’s beloved car collection in black and white photography, for his office wall. Kim flew out to take the photos of the car collection, in front of centuries-old churches, in black pine forests and down cobbled streets. The shoot was a success and that evening, while musing over the images, the discussion of doing a book re-emerged. The timing was right, and so *A Sense of Space* was born.

I would like to thank my whole family, especially my wife, Susan, who is often a sounding-board for many of my designs; Ethan, my son, and Hannah-Rayne, my daughter; Greg Thompson for the extra hours you put into the book; along with my entire team at Blok Designs for interpreting my visions and bringing them to life. I acknowledge the excellent workmanship of my sub-contractors whose work is also demonstrated here. Finally, to all of my clients who have trusted and allowed me to transform their gardens, I thank you.

Jan Blok





I first became acquainted with Jan Blok when the formal, European-style garden he had designed for Camp Orchards in Durban was opened to the public. I was blown away by this man's talent and was also thrilled to have such design expertise on my doorstep. Jan graciously accepted my invitation to address my students on a regular basis regarding the importance of designing gardens on paper. This relationship continued for some years until his busy schedule put paid to his visits. During that time, I mentioned that I would like to write a book about his gardens, to which he consented and so, when Random House Struik approached me to work with them, the project was born.

Jan has a deep understanding of outside space and an innate ability to create a magical and wondrous garden for his clients, which is evidenced by the beautiful photographs taken by equally talented photographer, Kim Thunder.

It has been a delight working on this project, despite the frustrations of unseasonal rain and mist that put paid to many a photo shoot. My sincere thanks go firstly to Random House Struik for giving me this wonderful opportunity to convey in words the talents of Jan Blok; to Jan for entrusting your beautiful gardens to my 'pen'; to Greg Thompson, designer/project manager at Blok Designs, for all the assistance, fun and friendship; to Evan, my English professor, for his honest criticism; and to my beautiful daughter, Erin, for putting many a meal on the table so that I could work uninterrupted.

Lindsay Gray









# A Spectacular *Ocean View*

*T*he Bluff in KwaZulu-Natal is an imposing headland that forms the south-eastern arm of the Durban harbour. Once covered with uninterrupted natural coastal vegetation, it is now prized residential land for those who hanker after a magnificent view of the Indian Ocean.

This home, with its spectacular one-hundred-and-eighty degree view of the sea, was built in 1949 by Frederick Augustus George Love, a builder by trade. Love travelled from England through Africa with the intention of settling in the Cape, but was so captivated by the Bluff's unspoilt beauty on his arrival in Durban in 1947 that he chose to settle in Durban instead. This is just one of the many houses he built in the area, but its distinguishing feature is that it stretches across two plots of land to enable all the bedrooms to face true east.

The new owners recently renovated the entire home to suit the needs of their young family, after which they turned their attention to the garden. There was no entertainment area to speak of on the sea-facing side, and the narrow, uneven strip of lawn spanning the width of the house fell away steeply to the natural bush below.



**CLIENT BRIEF** To create a stylish entertainment area on the east-facing side of the home with its expansive sea view. The owners also commissioned a private viewing deck, as the garden is exposed to their neighbours.

**PREVIOUS SPREAD** Custom-made, sandblasted concrete pavers alongside the decking provide an interesting textural change around the pool.

The swimming pool was a major engineering feat, requiring nine piles, each sunk to a depth of twelve metres, to stabilise the structure in the soft sand that occurs along the coastline.

**BELOW** The deck surround is constructed from Balau wood. This hard wood is similar to teak in character. It withstands the elements, even enjoying the humidity, and can remain untreated as it bleaches well in the sun.

The design intention for the entertainment area was to create the illusion of space. A rim-flow pool and wooden deck surround were placed on the diagonal, to complement the lines of the house. The linear perspective of the decking has the effect of pulling the eye out towards the horizon, while the almost-perfect match in colour of the pool and the ocean further enhances the illusion.

Key architectural plants provide the structure to this modern garden. Succulents and aloes with their waxy leaves are the perfect choice for a seaside garden, as they cope well with the strong, salt-laden wind.















TOP LEFT *Aloe ferox* and *A. arborescens* are underplanted with *A. chabaudii* (Ground Aloe) and *Sanseveria cylindrica*. *Strelitzia nicolii* (Wild Banana) with their dramatic, wind-torn leaves, are positioned along the southern boundary wall to provide screening.

BOTTOM LEFT Stylish *chaises longue* dress the private viewing deck below the pool.

TOP Water spills gently over an eastern water jar with its delightful frog detail.

ABOVE Natural stone cladding on the boundary walls provides the perfect backdrop for the sculptural plant material selected for the garden. This particular stone contains fossilised iron deposits that age to a beautiful orange-brown hue, and is hand-split for a less contrived finish.

RIGHT A fringe of the lime-green, indigenous ornamental grass, *Aristida junciformis*, creates a beautiful contrast against the deep blue of the ocean in summer, but in winter its golden-brown tones (as pictured here) are reminiscent of a rugged Wild Coast landscape.



So as not to detract from the magnificent view, the garden is a blend of subtle hues of the green foliage, bleached-grey decking and the earthy tones of natural stone. In winter, however, the cheerful orange spires of aloes are contrasted against crisp blue skies.

The garden is transformed into an intimate space at night, where discreet lighting enhances the structure and textures of the garden.



RIGHT The raised timber edge completes the deck surround and creates a visual barrier.

OPPOSITE A wooden walkway leads to the viewing deck. The owners relish their private 'getaway' spot where they can relax and enjoy the view.















# Victorian *Charm*

Nestling in the well-wooded suburb of Kloof, KwaZulu-Natal, is a quaint, mixed-construction house that dates back to the late nineteenth century. The walls are a combination of asbestos and brick, the floors retain their original timber and the old corrugated iron roof is well hidden beneath its cover of modern-day Holley-Harvey tiles.

Kloof is located 650 metres above sea level, 30 kilometres outside Durban. Although still within the sub-tropical climatic zone, Kloof and the adjoining suburbs of Hillcrest, Gillitts and Everton are located in what is known as the 'mist belt'. The early colonists who settled in Durban regarded this area as a welcome retreat from the oppressive sub-tropical humidity. In the worst of the heat, families would pack their belongings and head for the hills where the temperature is at least three degrees cooler than along the coast, and the mist brings the longed-for relief in the early morning and late afternoon.



The acquisition of this particular home was serendipitous for its current owners. Shortly after the couple married, they viewed the house with estate agents and fell in love with it. At that time, financial institutions were not prepared to mortgage wood-and-iron dwellings, and so the newlyweds were unable to purchase their dream home.

Over the years they've lived in various parts of the world, but whenever they came back to visit family, they would drive past 'their' house. A chance drive-by some years ago revealed that the house was again for sale, and they purchased it. 'It was like coming home,' they recall.

**CLIENT BRIEF** Jan had already designed a beautiful, formal garden for the previous owners several years before, so the client commissioned him to revamp only certain areas, to suit the needs of their family. The client was happy to retain the predominantly white and green garden, but requested that the herb garden be replaced with a mixed-colour rose garden.









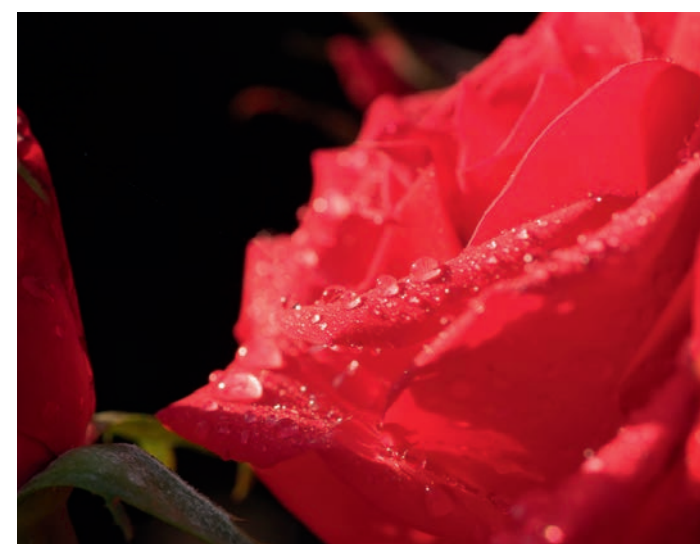






The formal design of the garden suits the home, preserving the integrity of its typically Victorian architecture. The garden is divided into several charming spaces on different levels, creating the illusion that the property is larger than its 2 000 square metres. Hedges of meticulously clipped *Syzigium paniculatum* define these areas, providing a fine example of green architecture.

The owners settled on a neutral taupe shade for the exterior of the home, retaining the contrasting white ‘broekie-lace’ detail, window frames and columns. The arches, trelliswork and garden gates are all white timber lattice, further enhancing the understated, elegant design.



OPPOSITE (TOP AND BOTTOM) A pathway bisects the rectangular lawn and leads to a sunny terrace below, where many a breakfast is enjoyed in winter, overlooking the colourful rose garden.





TOP Identical second-hand gates, mounted on either side of the back screening wall, add a 'shabby-chic' feel to the kitchen courtyard.

The kitchen courtyard that once functioned purely as a utility area has been transformed into a tranquil space that the owners overlook from their kitchen. A visually softer, gravel surface has replaced the original pavers. Four *Acer palmatum* planted in the courtyard cast their dappled shade in the summer months.

Two staggered walls are an effective screen for the laundry and quaint potting shed, also providing a backdrop for the water feature.

Fragrance fills the courtyard from the *Murraya exotica* hedge and the border of lavender skirting the kitchen's classic cottage-pane windows.











The original herb garden is now a show of beautiful roses in shades of pink and red, interspersed with white, against a backdrop of lemon and lime trees. Here Orion, the mythical hunter, stands guard over his charges.













On a clear day the owners have an uninterrupted view of the Indian Ocean, from Umhlanga in the north to Durban harbour in the south. However, when the mist descends, obscuring this expansive view, the structure and form of the garden predominate, adding a moody yet enchanting dimension to it.

A simple palette of plants ensures a surprisingly low-maintenance garden. The outer perimeter of the property is hedged with the elegant Cypress, *Cupressus leylandii*. A bank of the large-leafed ivy, *Hedera helix*, retains the soil on the dry, east-facing slope.

The lower terrace leads from below the swimming pool to the seating area beside the rose garden and is lined with *Mackaya bella*, an indigenous shade-loving shrub and, in the sunny areas, *Westringia fruticosa*. *Zantedeschia aethiopica* (white Arum) and the white-and-pink daisy, *Erigeron karvinskianus*, settle where they feel comfortable under the taller shrubs. The same hedging plant, *Syzigium paniculatum*, is used to fill the pyramid obelisks and form the topiaries. Throughout this elegant garden, *Duranta erecta* 'Sheena's Gold' adds her striking touch.









# A Garden *of Contrasts*

*P*erched high on the Berea above the city of Durban, the garden stirs. As the vermilion dawn breaks, imposing forms stretch tall after a night's rest; silver plumes slide from under the cover of dark to celebrate a new day.

The setting is dramatic. Daytime views from this contemporary penthouse span the gracious, well-wooded suburb in the west, across the city's skyline to the Indian Ocean and north up the coastline to Umhlanga. At night, the view extends over the city to the flickering lights of ships waiting patiently out at sea to enter the harbour.

Up here, storms rage more fiercely, the wind howls menacingly and the sun beats down hard.

**CLIENT BRIEF** The client requested a practical, low-maintenance garden that would enhance his investment in this prestige apartment block. He also requested an entertainment area that was sheltered from the wind.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The putting green is intersected by an arrow-shaped section of deck that draws the eye further into the garden. A single step up onto this platform causes a moment's hesitation and a heady sense of anticipation.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT The metal and stainless steel components of the design lend an industrial feel to this inner-city garden.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT Delicate chains extend through the weepholes of the water trough. Water hugs each chain as it descends. This not only creates a dramatic effect, but prevents excessive water loss through strong wind.

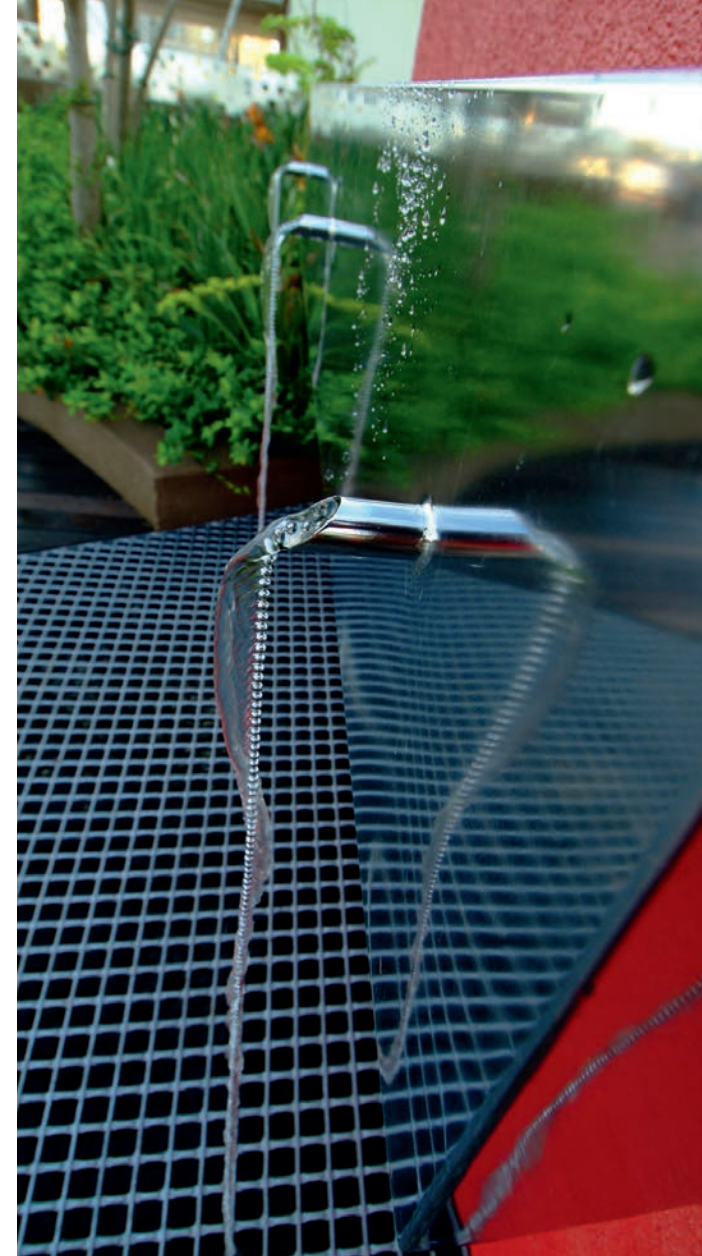
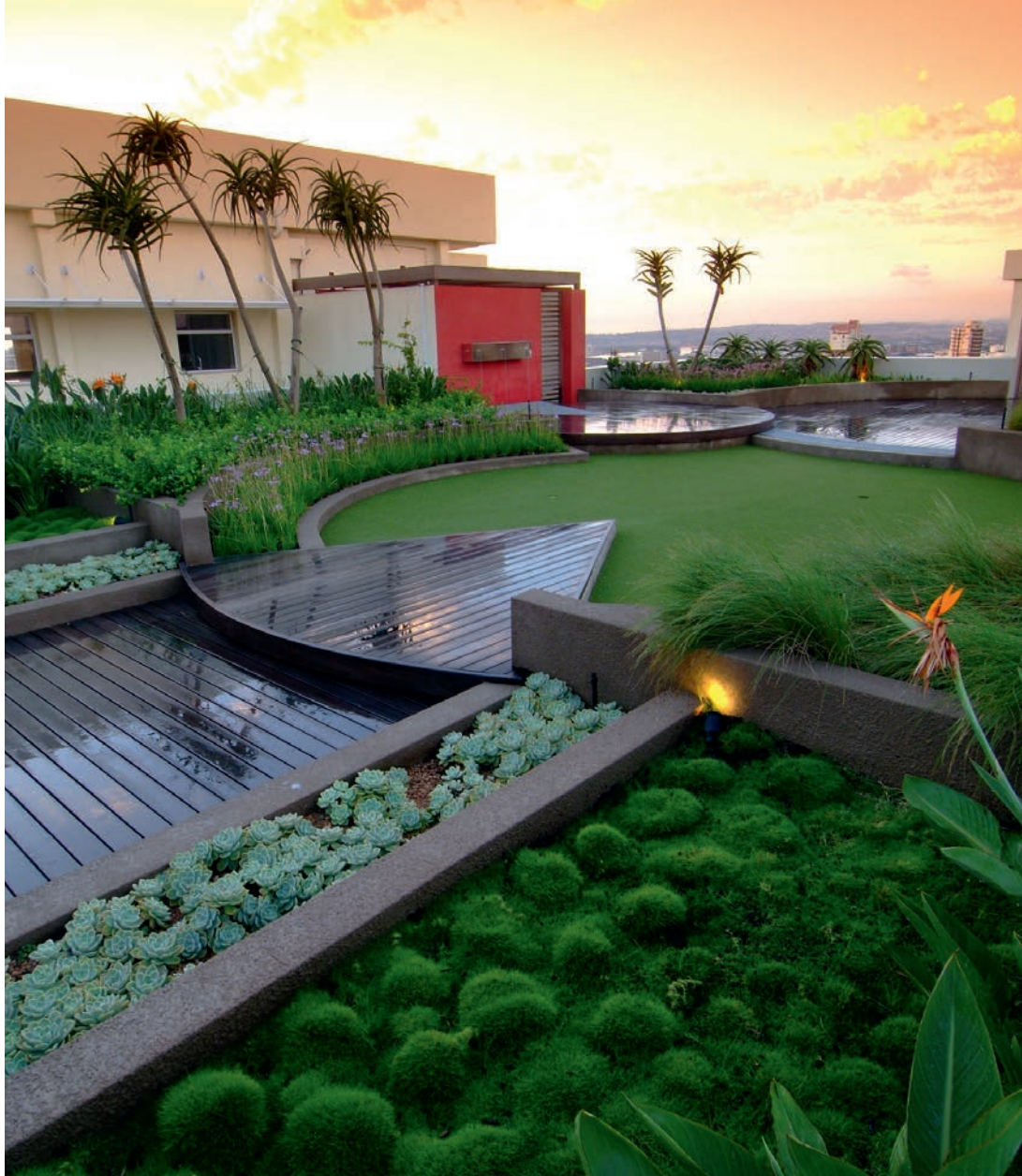
The rectangular rooftop garden was a blank canvas with no defining features to steer Jan and his design team. Inspired by the concept of inner-city living in the twenty-first century, a garden of contrasts was born.

Jan has created an oasis; a collage of striking form, texture and vibrant colour, grounded by the natural elements of wood, metal, stone and water.

The garden is described by a series of overlapping circles at varying heights to suggest three separate spaces.

A circular synthetic turf beckons one across the wooden walkway leading from the entrance. The green floor visually softens the predominance of hard surfaces and sculptural plants. It was a temptation too difficult to resist – the perfectly smooth surface

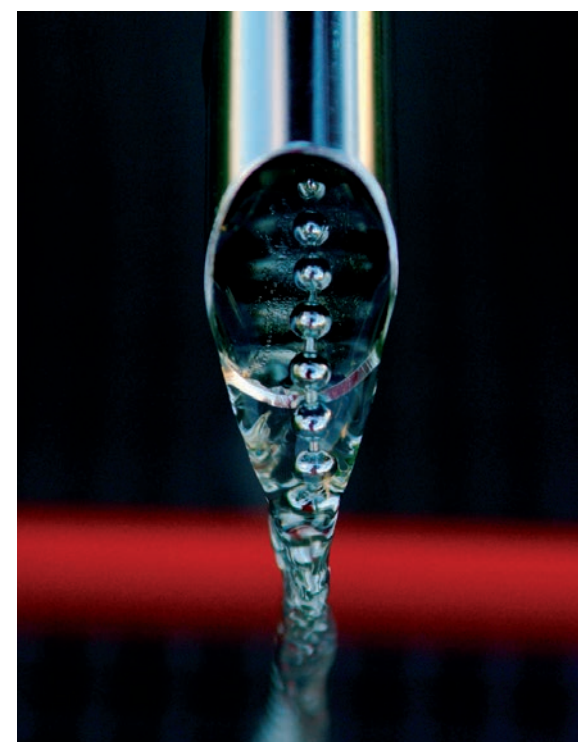




became a putting green, with the putting cups doubling as necessary drainage holes. While not on his original wish list, the client is now making good use of this feature to relax and unwind.

Beyond this, two wooden decks, set at different levels, are constructed from balau wood, a suitably lightweight material for a rooftop garden. A semi-circular water feature frames the main entertainment deck with its backdrop of rich stone cladding. Water spills gently out of the pond into a rill sunken into the deck, which is fitted with an industrial metal grid.

The slightly elevated deck provides convenient access to the kitchen. The fire-engine red wall of the courtyard makes a striking statement. Water flows from the long, sleek stainless steel trough mounted on the wall into a triangular, grid-covered receptacle below.











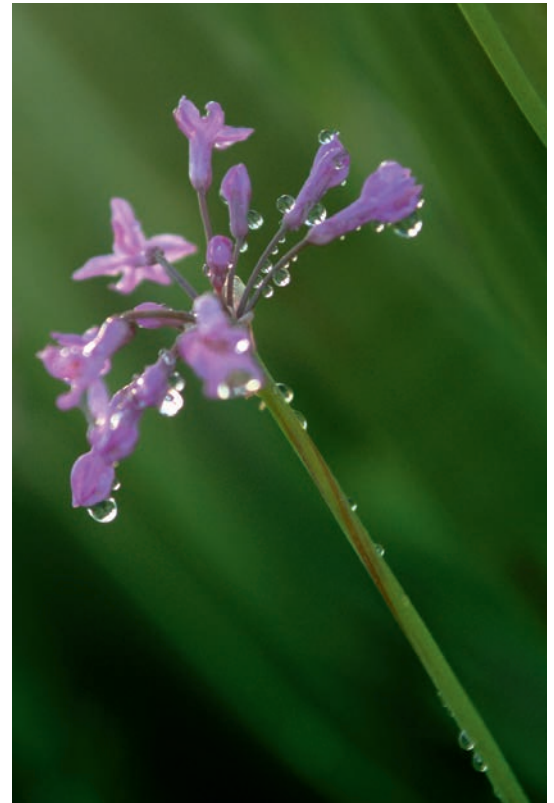
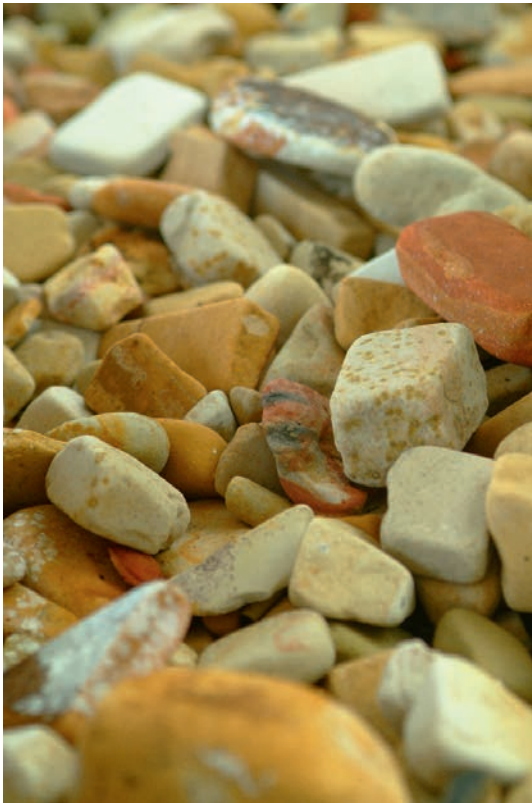
A perfect fusion of natural materials – rich siltstone, wood, water, metal and evocative plant textures.

Weight limitation was a crucial factor for the construction of this rooftop garden. Provision was never made in the initial construction of the building for a garden eleven stories high, thus the outer walls, rather than the centre of the roof, have to bear the weight of the various structures.

Accordingly, the infrastructure of the garden rests on stilts on the outer extremities and butts into the various planter boxes for additional strength. Aerated concrete planters are filled with a lightweight potting medium especially mixed for this project, while the plants in this design all have shallow, fibrous root systems.

It is natural to feel exposed and vulnerable on a rooftop garden. To achieve a sense of 'terra firma' for his client, Jan introduced as many natural materials as possible. The planter walls have a splattered plaster finish that will age to a natural patina. Warm, rusting siltstone in rich, orange-brown tones clads the wall adjacent to the main deck. The welcoming private parking area at the entrance to the penthouse has interlocking geometric patterns of pressed pebble pitching, defined by scored multi-coloured cement lengths that resemble pavers.





With little protection from the elements, the choice of plants was crucial. Drawing from an Afro-Mexican palette, each species was chosen both for its wind-resistance and low water tolerance.

The sculptural forms of *Aloe barbarae*, *Aloe ferox*, *Echinocactus grusonii* (Golden Barrel Cactus) and *Agave americana* make a dramatic statement at the entrance, juxtaposed with softer plantings of *Asparagus densiflorus*, *Echeveria elegans* and *Euphorbia milii* var. *splendens* 'Candy Pink'.

Metal screens with square cut-outs provide partial privacy from this area, at the same time enticing one to breach the visual barrier and explore further.

The two raised planters encircling the putting green are dressed differently. Several *Aloe barbarae* stand tall against the backdrop of the penthouse with their feet in a bed of fragrant *Trachelospermum jasminoides*. *Strelitzia reginae*, South Africa's national flower, and the Rain Iris, *Diets grandiflora*, are layered beneath these statuesque forms, while *Tulbachia violacae* gently fringes the circle.





The less protected western aspect is subjected to strong winds, and so it was appropriate to choose a low planting of mixed grasses. A combination of the purple *Pennisetum setaceum* ‘rubrum’ and the indigenous *Aristida junciformis* create waves of movement in even the gentlest breeze. Plumes shimmer in the long, warm rays of the late afternoon sun; their silhouetted forms bid farewell to the day as they slip once more under the cover of night.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT Tumbled Lesotho stone is the perfect showcase for sculptural plants.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT *Echeveria elegans*, a befitting name, conjures a dramatic contrast against the fine-leaved *Zoysia tenuifolia*.

ABOVE Used correctly and sparingly, synthetic turf is practical for a rooftop garden. In this setting, it softens the predominance of hard surfaces.









# Villa Borghese

Four very distinct gardens within a gated community on the Highveld just outside Johannesburg, Gauteng, each won garden designer *extraordinaire*, Jan Blok, a gold medal from the South African Landscapers' Institute (SALI).

The architect and developer on this project sourced their ideas for building materials in Bologna, Italy, to ensure that the complex was authentically Mediterranean. This attention to detail scooped the developer a national and provincial award for Best Home Builder in 2006.

Jan and the interior designer worked in unison to ensure a definite visual link between the interior and exterior of each home in this community. Designed to honour the integrity of the architecture, each garden is nevertheless very different in its style to satisfy the individual taste of the owners. However, the palette of mostly indigenous plants chosen by Jan for this estate, features consistently throughout each of the four gardens, demonstrating the versatility of South African plants across different styles of gardening and tempering the Mediterranean-styled architecture with a hint of the African landscape.

LEFT Mature specimens of the indigenous shrub *Buddleja saligna* – reminiscent of the European Olive tree, with their gnarled trunks and silver-grey foliage – line the communal driveway. These are underplanted with the textured, non-variegated *Chlorophytum comosum* to soften the cobblestone surfacing.





ABOVE A magnificent water feature, divided into a series of reflective pools, runs the length of the living area. The gently moving water creates a wonderful ambience, while lighting in the evening adds a sense of drama to the entertainment area.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT The boundary wall adjacent to the gazebo runs at an angle to the home. This is squared off with a planting area filled with *Strelitzia nicolaii*, *Phormium tenax* 'variegata', *Cyathea australis* and *Livistona chinensis* palms.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT A beautiful earthen vessel creates a strong focal point at the end of the swimming pool. Lush, textured greenery (*Rhapis excelsa* and *Cyperus alternifolius*) transports one to an exotic tropical island.

## Tropical Splendour

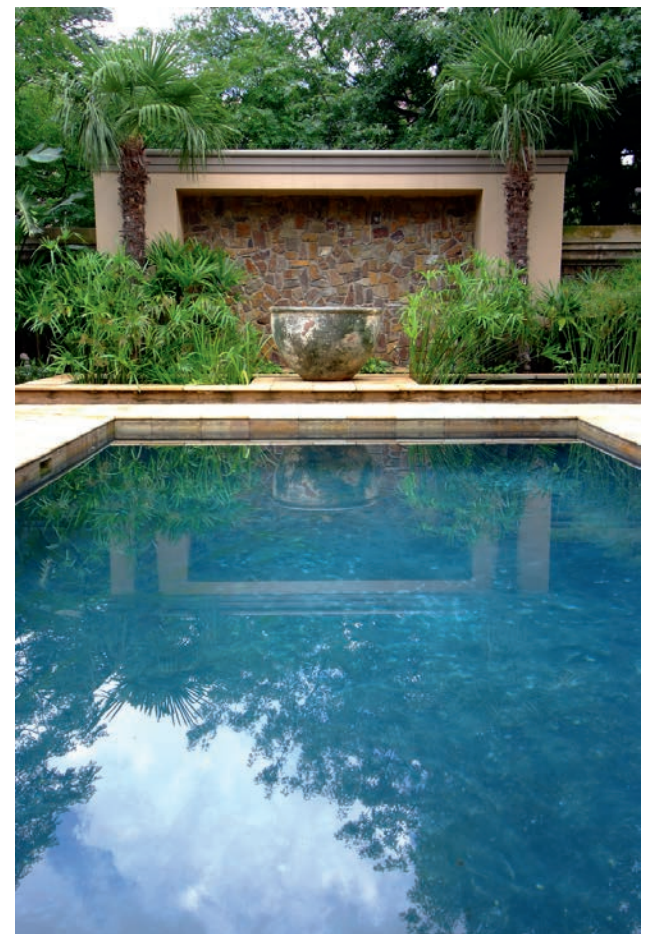
**CLIENT BRIEF** A low-maintenance, tropical garden to suit the Balinese-style interior décor.

The clients have three teenage boys who live at home.

The first glimpse of the garden is through the full-length, clear-glass doors leading off the kitchen. 'Floating' sandstone pavers beckon one over the reflective pond, flanked by erect canes of black-stemmed bamboo, *Phytostachys nigra*, to the raised Balinese-style gazebo.

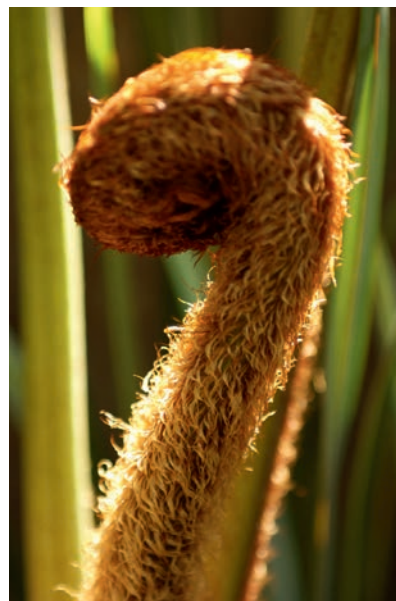
A generous steel-blue swimming pool sits below the gazebo, adjoining an expanse of lawn.





Very much a family home, the clients' three teenage boys make constant use of the lawn and the swimming pool with their friends.

The all-green garden is filled with lush, textured tropical plants and an exotic water feature in front of the house that complements the Balinese-style interior of the home.





BELOW The imposing water feature graces the narrow area running along the front of the home.

A low hedge of *Murraya exotica* creates a sill beneath the windows. Each window in the home frames a spectacular picture of the garden.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT Water flows over three rills into the top pool opposite the elegant entertainment area.

The key element of this garden is the magnificent water feature that runs the length of the house. It is broken into different chambers, creating three distinct reflective pools. Water flows into the main pool over three rills set into the boundary wall. Large, Eastern, slow-baked clay urns punctuate the design.

Each of the chambers is filled with koi, goldfish, and a mix of strappy water plants to break the horizontal plane. The water acoustics calm the sound of traffic, which is especially important when the clients entertain.







A boundary wall acts as a backdrop to this feature. To enhance this stretch of wall, Jan designed two recesses that showcase the bulbous clay urns. This entire section of wall is embedded with siltstone in warm, earthy tones.

Lighting transforms the garden into a magical space in the evening.



ABOVE LEFT Carefully placed lighting either highlights or throws into silhouette the many varied textures and structures in this tropical paradise.





## A Hint of Provence

ABOVE An avenue of brick pillars frames the rectangular swimming pool. The slender bricks used in the construction of the pillars were especially commissioned by the developer for this project.

OPPOSITE TOP A view from the gazebo across to the contemplative garden.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To design a French-style garden in terms of the hard landscaping, at the same time using predominantly indigenous plants.

*A*s this garden space is relatively small, its design relies on strong architectural features for impact.

The garden lies on a horizontal axis, parallel to the home. An avenue of brick columns, mounted with timber beams, frames the small rectangular swimming pool. Jan designed a tranquil, contemplative garden for his client to the left of the pool and, to the right, a raised





gazebo for entertaining. All three features lie on this strong axis, with glimpses of each visible from opposite ends of the garden.

The grey lap pool doubles as a water feature, with plain copper spouts spilling the circulating water. The rich, siltstone-clad feature wall adds an earthy tone that is repeated in the pebble inlay and slabs of sandstone coping around the pool.

A mature *Acacia siberiana* frames the contemplative garden, while a classic Lutyens-style bench invites one to pause awhile and enjoy this intimate space. The stylish cast-iron urn, filled with decorative *Echeveria elegans*, makes a beautiful centrepiece, set within the bark-covered circle. Mixed indigenous planting softens the boundary wall behind the bench.







TOP *Acacia siberiana* shades the reflective garden with its view back towards the pool. Bark nuggets provide a soft, muted flooring to emphasise the quiet of this area.

TOP RIGHT The stylishly furnished gazebo has drop-down reed blinds for protection from the wind.

OPPOSITE MAIN Identical cast-iron urns, filled with the Cape Thatching Grass, *Chondropetalum tectorum*, grace the slender water feature outside the dining area.

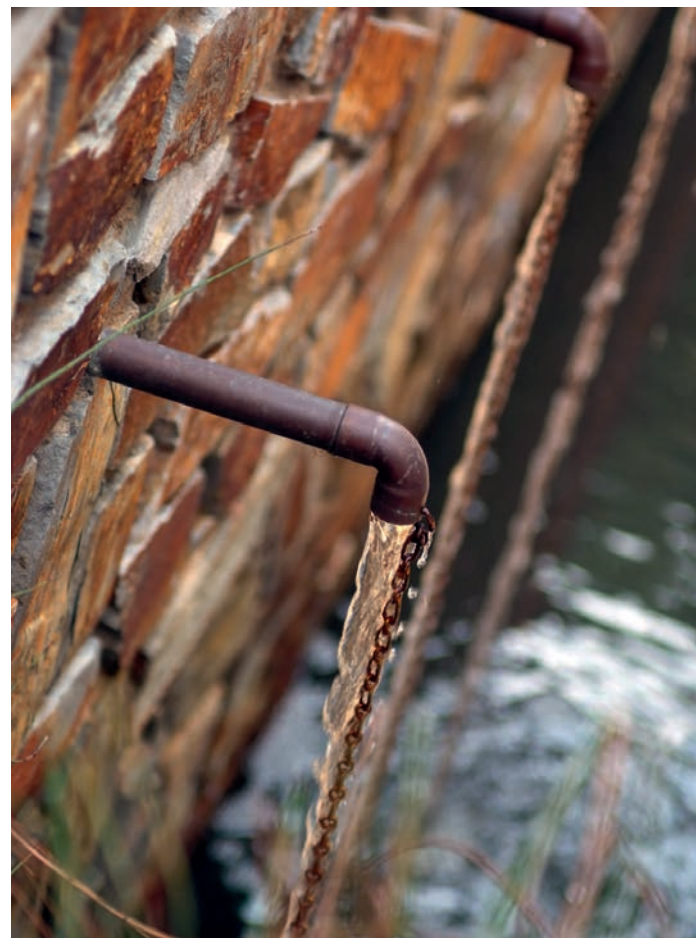


The gazebo provides a comfortable entertainment area for the clients. A green-glazed oil jar features against the warm tones of the boundary wall, which is slowly being smothered by a web of Boston Ivy (*Parthenocissus tricuspidata* spp).

Leading off the gazebo, a slender water feature runs the length of the boundary wall, creating a tranquil picture for both the dining area and the kitchen. The siltstone cladding is repeated here and, in keeping with this confined area, the copper spouts are more delicate than those used at the swimming pool. The same style of urn is repeated in the water feature, and is planted with the indigenous water-loving grass, *Chondropetalum tectorum*.

As with the previous garden, the plant palette is predominantly green with occasional splashes of colour. Sculptural tree aloes, *Aloe barbarae*, flank the bench in the contemplative garden, underplanted with groups of *Dietes bicolor*, *Strelitzia reginae* and *Asparagus densiflorus* 'Myers'. Mature indigenous olive trees, *Olea europea* subs. *africana*, with masses of orange-flowering *Clivia miniata* at their feet, cast welcome shade over the gazebo in summer.









## A Touch of Africa

**ABOVE** Timber capping on the raised planters provides additional seating in the area leading off the kitchen. A mature *Acacia siberiana* presides over this space with layered plantings beneath it of *Aloe ferox*, *Aristida junciformus* and *Chondropetalum tectorum*.

**OPPOSITE MAIN** Sculptural aloes convey a bushveld ambience with the softer indigenous olive, *Olea europea* subs. *africana* in the background and a low planting of *Juncus kraussii* to complete the scenario.

This was an existing garden that Jan was commissioned to redesign. The area of concern was overgrown with a plethora of palms and azaleas, and a lawn that was permanently damp and muddy. The clients had seen Jan's other work in the complex, and wanted a similar quality in their garden.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To redesign the area leading off the kitchen in order to gain more space and incorporate indigenous plants into the design that would reflect their love of the African bush.



The central feature of this small garden is a gazebo with a plunge pool on either side of it. A moat surrounding the gazebo creates the impression that the gazebo is afloat.

In the area of concern, Jan has replaced the entire lawn with a hardwood deck so that the open-plan kitchen can now flow effortlessly to the outdoors, providing a superb *al fresco* entertainment area.

Raised planters lend a strong framework for layers of indigenous plants that are reminiscent of a bushveld landscape. Thick timber capping on these raised planters doubles as additional seating.











The area is filled with evocative textures from Africa. Slivers of slate create an unusual cladding for the planters that contain sculptural aloes and elegant, slender grasses. Smooth terracotta pots filled with frilly bougainvillea add a splash of bright pink to the understated colour scheme. A majestic *Acacia siberiana* dominates the area with its feathery, pale green canopy.

Jan decided upon a natural plaster finish for the boundary walls in this garden. The natural patina of the walls provides the perfect burnt-orange backdrop for the African theme.



OPPOSITE TOP Subtle lighting highlights the essential architectural elements outdoors.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT The Tree Aloe, *Aloe barbarae*, is underplanted with *Aloe ferox* and *Aristida junciformis* against the furthestmost boundary wall. Identical, raised, sandstone-clad water features act as a backdrop to each of the plunge pools.





## An Eclectic Highveld Garden

ABOVE The distinctive silver-white trunks of *Betula alba* frame the vista of the swimming pool. Rich siltstone displays prominently on the boundary walls that are planted with *Buddleja saligna* and *Clivia miniata*.

OPPOSITE TOP A flowering *Buddleja saligna* frames the swarthy entrance doors.

OPPOSITE MAIN The dramatic backdrop to the grey pool features inlays of timber sleepers with studded detail. An eclectic mix of furnishings adorns the poolside deck.

This garden was commissioned by the developer of the complex and, at the time, there was no specific client brief. Jan did a playful take on Highveld gardening, using an eclectic mix of plants that work surprisingly well together, such as the dramatic silver birch tree, *Betula alba*, which thrives in this hot summer/cold winter climate, and a selection of sub-tropical perennials.

Playful or not, when it came to the design, Jan's expert eye took stock of the fact that this is a relatively narrow garden. He divided it into three separate areas of functionality to give it a sense of space.



Unlike the other homes in the complex, this one does not have a gazebo as its main focus. Instead, a dramatic feature wall is the perfect backdrop to the swimming pool. Two recesses were created in this sandstone-clad wall, with a central alcove from which water splashes teasingly into the pool. Each recess is inlaid with original timber railway sleepers and, to contrast with the smoothness of the timber, the alcove is adorned with pressed pebble detail.

A hardwood surface leads from the covered verandah to the pool. To the right of this deck there is a tranquil grove of *Betula alba*, while, to the left, the same tree forms an avenue that leads back to the intimate patio off the study.







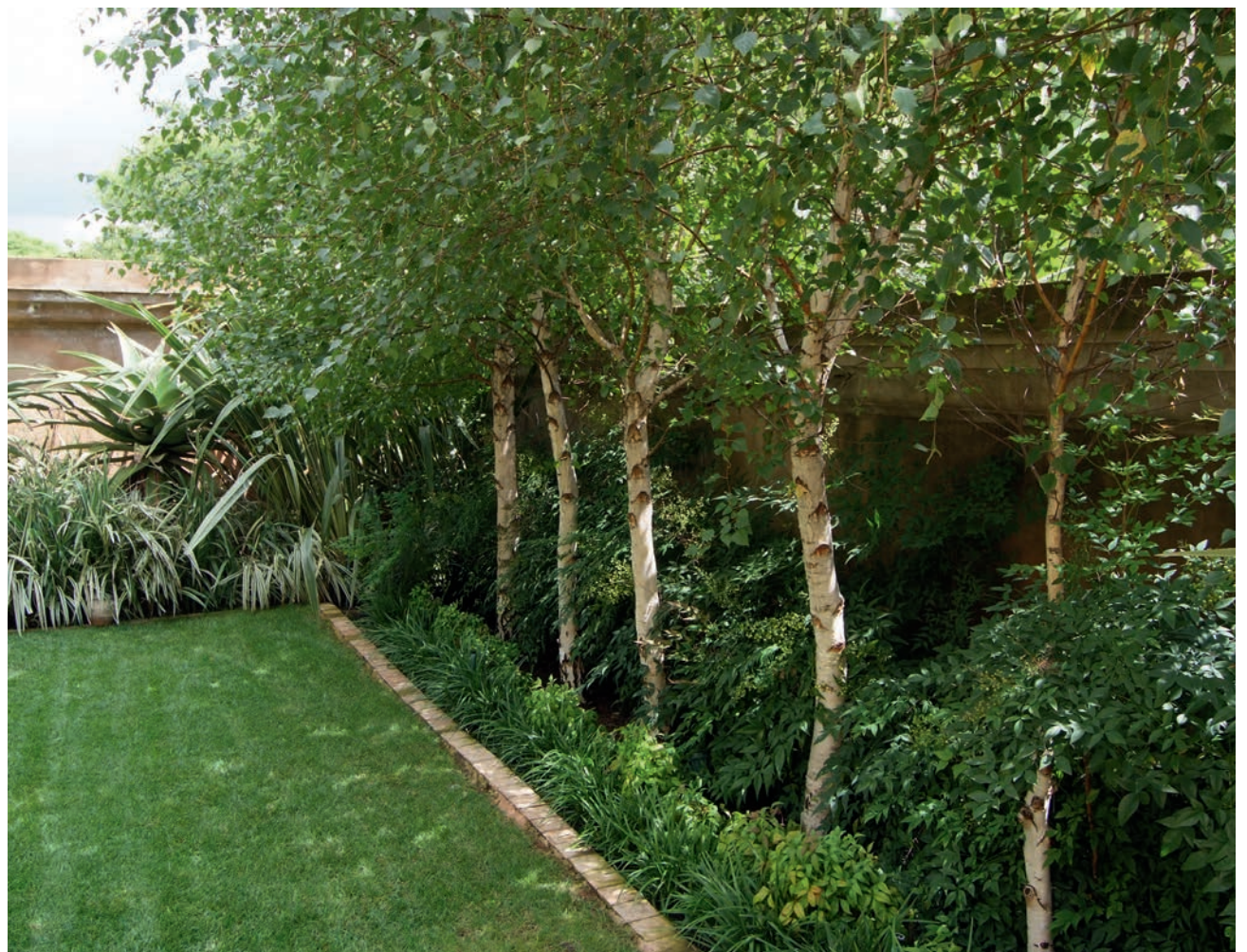
ABOVE AND OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The plant-covered patio is the perfect location for a clay urn. An avenue of *Betula alba* opens onto this sunny planting of *Dietes bicolor*, underplanted with tufted *Carex morrowii* 'Variegata'. Fragrant *Trachelospermum jasminoides* will soon cover the pergola.

A delightfully eclectic mix of furnishings decorates the poolside. Oversized daybeds, bold clay urns and a carved dugout lend an East African atmosphere to the space, complemented by the oriental furnishings on the covered verandah.





RIGHT Soft underplantings frame the lush lawn. The taller *Nandina domestica* towers over its smaller cousin, *Nandina domestica* 'pygmaea'. Sculptural *Aloe ferox* contrast with the softer *Liriope muscari* and *Dianella tasmanica* 'Variegata'.











# Midlands

## *Country Garden*

*T*he Midlands in KwaZulu-Natal offers some of the most picturesque countryside imaginable. Tourists are drawn to this area by its charming villages, country hotels and fascinating arts-and-crafts route. For others, the Midlands is the ideal holiday destination, with its stretches of undulating verdant farmland, indigenous forests and numerous rivers that make it a sought-after destination for anglers.

In this idyllic setting, Jan designed a perfect country garden for his client's weekend home, situated on a private estate.

**CLIENT BRIEF** The clients requested a country garden filled with plants that are unsuitable for their sub-tropical, coastal garden.



The design intention was to create a country garden befitting the architecture of the home and surrounding landscape. Set on varying levels, the garden accommodates several distinct areas, each with its own charm: the front garden with a colourful herbaceous border; a sunken, contemplative area; and the adjoining entertainment area.

The structure of the garden is bold and formal in its design. The lines are softened, however, with voluptuous herbaceous borders that provide a show of colour throughout summer. In winter, when the garden lies dormant, the stark beauty of the structure prevails.



ABOVE The Natal Chirping Frog, *Arthroleptella hewitti*, serenades the garden from the reflective pond







RIGHT Formal lines define the garden, while voluptuous herbaceous plantings both soften the design and frame the tranquil private dam below the property.





Jan enjoys working with local materials and, for this home, he chose a beautiful burnt-orange Lidgetton stone from which to construct the rustic dry-stacked wall that hems the driveway. Out in the garden, some of the walls are also built from this stone, while the stairs and retaining walls, with their detailed capping, have a natural plaster finish.

A generous wrap-around verandah frames the impressive view across the rolling hills of the Midlands. Access to the front garden is flanked on either side with rectangular boxes of clipped miniature *Pyracanthus* hedging. Glorious roses and standard fuchsias in mixed pink hues are set within these green frames.

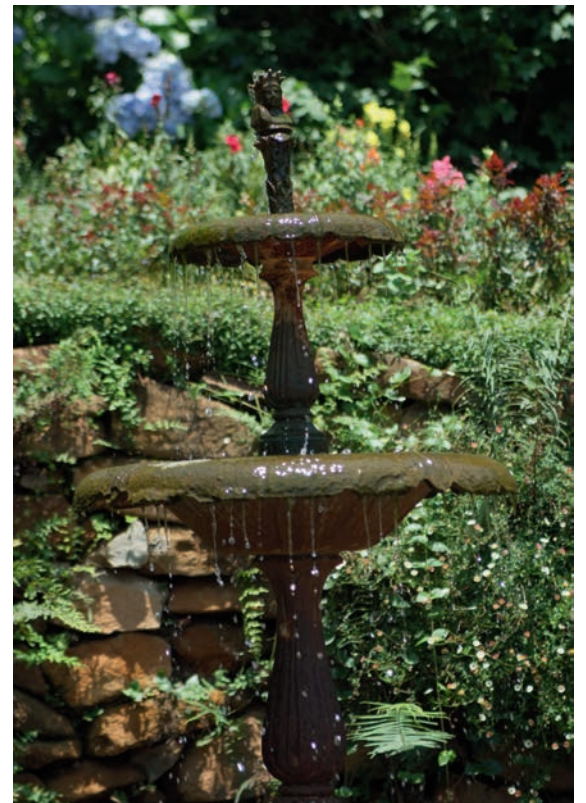




Herbaceous borders overflowing with a frothy mix of lavender (*Lavandula dentata*), pale pink *Guara lindheimerii*, Penstemon 'Deep Wine', *Spirea japonica*, Wild Garlic (*Tulbachia violacae*) and Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* spp.) define the velvet lawn, providing a delightful prelude to the landscape beyond.



ABOVE Local Lidgetton stone was used in the construction of the feature walls, evoking a rustic, country appeal.



ABOVE A tiered, cast-iron fountain set into a recess in the dry-stack wall creates a pretty focal point opposite the front door.





ABOVE Sturdy, clipped hedges of the hybrid dwarf *Pyracanthus* provide a sense of intimacy to the generous verandah.

OPPOSITE TOP The reflective pool with its mischievous water sprite provides an attractive feature from the raised pergola. The picture-perfect backdrop of the gently rolling hills of the Midlands completes the scene.

Jan has employed subtle changes in level to define the entertainment area and its adjoining sunken garden. A step down from the front garden brings one to the elongated reflective pool, its still water occasionally disturbed by the dip of a dancing dragonfly or the lazy movement of the Natal Chirping Frog. The mischievous water sprite stands as still as a heron hunting its prey.

White and mauve *Wisteria sinensis* drapes the stately pergola, providing a charming show in spring. A sweeping staircase leads off this patio up to the guest suite, which is on the same level as the garages. The banks on either side of the stairs are covered with the fast-growing *Juniperus horizontalis* 'Wiltonii'.

All the plants for this country garden were chosen not only for their charm, but specifically to suit the Midlands winter that brings several heavy drifts of snow and occasional black frost.





ABOVE Graceful posts at the bottom of the sunken garden signal the start of the meander down to the dam.

LEFT A gracious set of stairs leads from the wisteria-covered pergola to the beautifully appointed guest suite.









LEFT Jan's team constructed the jetty on the private dam from which the client and his guests can launch small craft.









# Riversfield

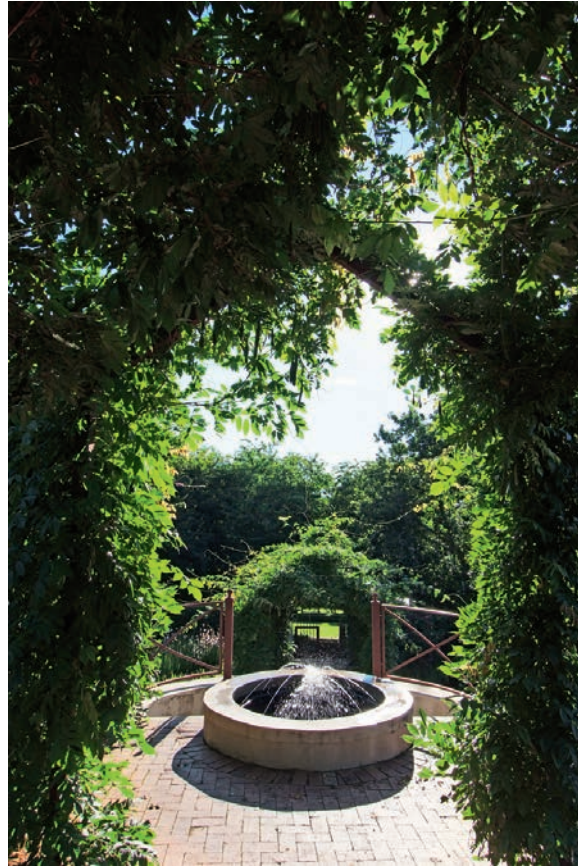
*T*he fertile Caversham valley in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands lies amid rolling hills, natural forests and crystal-clear rivers. Situated between Lidgetton and Balgowan, it is a stone's throw from one of South Africa's finest boys' schools, Michaelhouse, an Anglican Diocesan College.

The owners of this picturesque working Charolais stud farm in the Caversham valley bought the property initially to be close to their sons, who were boarders at Michaelhouse. Today the boys are adults, but the farm remains a wonderful sanctuary for the entire family.

**CLIENT BRIEF** The clients requested Jan to implement the design for a *potager*, designed for them by British designer David Hicks.

LEFT Each aperture in the Wisteria-covered arched pathway creates a vista through to the verdant pastures beyond.





RIGHT *Buxus sempervirens* criss-crosses the planting area, creating triangles for varied textures of planting. The topiary frames vary in shape throughout the *potager*.

Iconic British garden designer David Hicks was responsible for the design of the farm garden. The couple was introduced to Hicks by their interior designer, André Louw, who had worked with him in England. Hicks visited the stud farm every two months, where he would stay for just a day, formulating his designs for different aspects of the garden. He never personally implemented his designs for any of his South African clients, preferring instead to engage local landscapers and horticulturalists to do so, at the same time encouraging them to choose appropriate plant material to suit the particular climate.

Sadly, his design for the *potager* (traditional design for a fruit and vegetable garden) on the farm in Caversham was not implemented before his death.











ABOVE Blue skies and rich, verdant foliage throw the magnificent farmhouse in the Caversham valley into relief. The same Indian Red paint has been used for all the structural work throughout the garden.

OPPOSITE TOP David Hicks designed this formal pavilion as a backdrop to the swimming pool and pleached hedge enclosure.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Charolais cattle gaze peacefully at the verdant pasture, reminding one that this is still a thriving farm.

It is befitting, however, that the owners invited Jan to implement the intricate *potager* design. He had revamped the garden at their Durban residence and, after seeing the quality of his work, they were convinced that he would best interpret Hicks’s plan for the *potager*.

‘I was astounded that I should be approached to implement Hicks’s design,’ notes Jan. ‘I am an ardent admirer of the man’s work, especially its formality, symmetry and the slightly “offbeat” approach that set him apart from other designers.’

It is probable that this was the last of Hicks’s designs to be implemented after his death.

It was a difficult assignment for a variety of reasons. Access to the site was via the pastures, frequently occupied by testosterone-filled stud bulls. The cold was biting, the soil damp and sticky with its high clay content. ‘But it was an amazing experience,’ Jan recalls.









## The Construction

The design of this ambitious *potager* spans two distinct levels, the upper level retained by a lofty three-metre wall that is ‘battered’ or set back at a slight angle to reduce its imposing stance.

A network of connecting paths divides the garden into six planting areas. Two paths lead into the *potager* on the lower level, each with its own set of stairs that connects the two levels and culminates in a water feature – one circular and the other octagonal – illustrating Hicks’s fondness for the unusual. Even the patterns of the water spouts vary.





The upper landing bisects the design at right angles, off which two paths radiate yet again, emulating those on the lower level. All the paths are covered with metal archways, over which the climber, *Wisteria sinensis*, provides a spectacular show with its festoons of lilac flowers in spring.

The challenge of this installation, Jan relates, is that Hicks deliberately set the design at five degrees off-centre from its square perimeter, so that the six planting areas formed by the paths are asymmetrical. The dimensions of each opposite corner are identical in their

OPPOSITE TOP The retaining wall is 'battered' by five degrees to soften its impact. Linear bands run horizontally across the wall, to counter its stark appearance. Apple trees are espaliered along the wall to gain maximum sunlight for the ripening fruit.

ABOVE The differently shaped water features lead the eye along the length of the landing.





asymmetry, while the upper and lower central rectangles are a mirror image of one another. Even the gateposts were built at a slight angle to accurately reflect the design.

Following Hicks's specifications to the letter for all the ironwork meant that each item had to be purpose-made. Hicks also specified that the structural elements throughout the homestead – including the roof of the gracious farmhouse – should be painted a timeless 'Indian Red', which contrasts beautifully with the greens in summer, and blends with the rich tones of the stark winter landscape.



The materials in the *potager* are understated. Rough red brick forms a herringbone pattern along the paths, framed with bands of river gravel into which the *Wisteria sinensis* is planted. The stairs and retaining wall have a natural plaster finish, with bullnose detail on the stairs and a capped edging along the walls.

There are no elaborate fittings, no strategically placed lighting. 'This is a farm garden,' Hicks reminded his clients, 'not a country club!'







As is the nature of a *potager*, it changes with the seasons as the fruit, vegetables and flowers mature and are harvested. In cold climates, a *potager* invariably remains dormant throughout winter.

The entire perimeter of this design has a hedge of the sturdy *Virburnum odoratissimum*, while the delicate-leafed *Buxus sempervirens* edges each planting section. The original mixed planting of fruit trees, herbs, vegetables and flowers, so typical of Hicks's other *potagers*, has since been removed and replaced with a more stylised planting at the owners' request.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Hicks designed two completely different water features to provide a focal point at the culmination of each of the paths on the upper terrace. The play of light through the Wisteria climber and on the water sprays entices the visitor to stroll through this masterfully designed garden.

ABOVE Each set of stairs culminates in a water feature, tempting the visitor to rest for a while. This is a garden that encourages strolling.









# Forest *View*

*T*he gracious suburb of Everton, KwaZulu-Natal, is one of the last vestiges of a tranquil country setting within easy distance of amenities. It adjoins the residential area of Kloof, both of which were once part of the original Richmond farm that encompassed 6 000 acres of valuable land. Unlike those in its neighbouring suburbs, properties in Everton may not be sub-divided below two acres, and so the area retains a country charm. Many properties have paddocks and stables; it is not uncommon to see riders on horseback ambling along tree-lined avenues.

The home of these clients sits on four acres of prime land in Everton. The family moved from London to South Africa some years ago and built a beautiful house with clean, contemporary lines.

**CLIENT BRIEF** The clients wanted a low-maintenance garden with plenty of open space for their two young sons to enjoy. They also requested a predominantly indigenous garden.









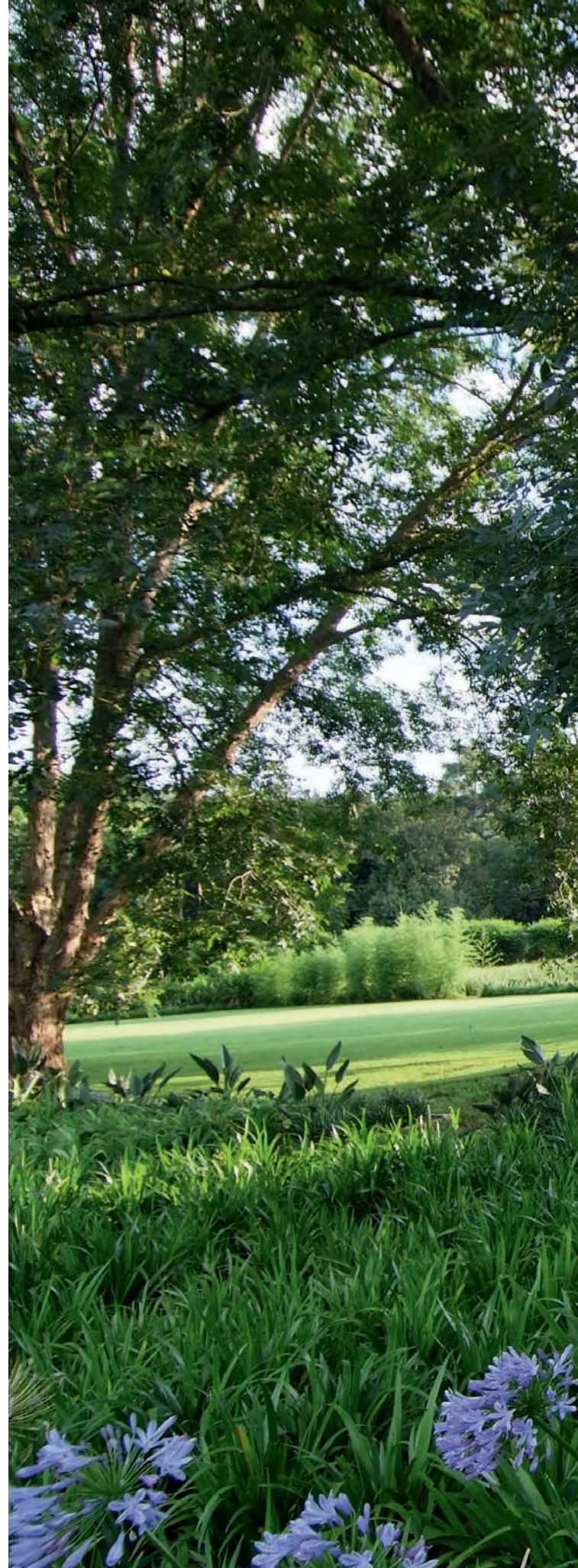
LEFT A pathway between the two reflective pools allows access to the garage side entrance. Water spills into a trough covered with an industrial grid – it's a great place to cool one's feet.

The design of the garden is simple and uncluttered, to match that of the home. Broad swathes of perennials and grasses separate the estate into different garden rooms, without destroying its parklike character.

A gravel driveway sweeps up to the house under a feathery canopy of *Acacia siberiana*, and, unlike most South African homes, does not lead directly to the front door. Guests are required to walk from the demarcated parking around to the entrance. Few are prepared for the sight that greets them.

The front entrance is a true celebration of light and texture. Two raised, reflective pools, with textured slivers of rich siltstone cladding, are positioned directly opposite the front door. Sun and shade play across the fluid surface throughout the day, the reflections in constant flux.





ABOVE LEFT The elegant Crane Flower, *Strelitzia reginae*.

ABOVE RIGHT A bed of *Strelitzia reginae* and *Ophiopogon jaburan* frames the expanse of lawn.

RIGHT Soft plantings of perennials demarcate the various rooms in the garden, as opposed to clipped hedges or lattice screens.

Groups of lanky *Cussonia spicata* (Cabbage Tree) match the proportions of the double-volume home. The feathery, silver-pink plumes of *Pennisetum setaceum* 'Rubrum' hint at the African savannah. Spiky *Phormium tenax* 'Variegata' strengthens the planting scheme.

Even the floor surface changes from the gravel of the driveway to a multi-coloured, pressed pebble pitching set in sandstone frames, which continues the African theme.

Mixed plantings of *Strelitzia reginae*, *Ophiopogon jaburan* and bamboo frame the expansive rectangular lawn in front of the home. Beyond the lawn, a row of *Acer negundo* disguises an exclusion area beyond, designed as a haven for birds, butterflies and other small wildlife.









To break the predominantly linear design of the garden, a circle of lawn sits close to the home in the shade of a mature London Plane. The indigenous Natal Giant Cycad, *Encephalartos natalensis*, punctuates the planting of *Agapanthus praecox* and *Dietes neomerika* at regular intervals.

Beyond the circle, a pathway deviates into an expanse of lawn with a centred pyramid frame as a strong focal point. *Virburnum odoratissimum* is slowly filling the frame.





OPPOSITE TOP A lawned path leads down to a shady part of the garden that still retains many of the older, English-style plants. In a bold move, Jan used Vetiver grass (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) to edge the beds and create a soft hedging option.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM A pyramid-shaped metal topiary frame echoes the pitch of the roofline.

BELOW A circle of lawn is punctuated with *Encephalartos natalensis* and massed with flowering perennials.







ABOVE A gravel platform against the house leads into several areas of interest.

RIGHT *Magnolia* 'Little Gem' greets visitors to the home. The use of magnolias was chosen to honour what must be a hundred-year-old magnolia at the top of the garden that blooms in summer with dinner-plate-sized white flowers.





A berm, shaped along the driveway, provides some privacy for the home when the entrance gate is opened. This area is planted with *Magnolia* 'Little Gem', with the insect-attracting *Chlorophytum saundersiae* as an attractive groundcover.

Areas of mature azaleas and hydrangeas remain as a tribute to the original garden. The focus, however, is on the newer, contemporary planting scheme that has provided an appropriate accompaniment to this beautiful home.

BELOW The client loves this ancient Pecan Nut tree, which has firmly staked its claim on the property.











OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT The photographer's lens catches the split-second beat of a bee's wing around the insect-attracting flower of *Chlorophytum saundersiae*.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT The sculptural *Aloe barbarae* finds great amusement in its own shadow!

LEFT Against the home, a still water feature rests in a carpet of wild indigenous grasses. Also visible from the kitchen window, the changing reflections are a source of constant delight.









# Red *Square*

*T*he leafy Johannesburg suburb of Parkview, over 100 years old, is an integral part of the city's early history. The suburb nestles in the midst of a green belt, bordering on the suburbs of Saxonwold and Forest Town that once were covered by dense plantations of exotic trees. Parkview's own gem is the beautiful, well-wooded Zoo Lake, so beloved of the public for strolls and relaxation time with friends and family.

The tree-lined avenues are graced with elegant homes built in the early 1900s. It is not uncommon to find second and third-generation families still living here. Many of these character homes have undergone renovations to accommodate a more relevant lifestyle, without compromising their charm.

Jan's client, the owner of a television production company, runs her business from her Parkview home. She originally commissioned Jan to install a water feature at her front entrance.





TOP The fruit of *Aesculus hippocastanum*, the Horse Chestnut tree.

ABOVE The water feature can be viewed from many vantage points upstairs. The area is always lit in the evening.

RIGHT The client loves the energy that Jan has infused into a once-neglected space, as well as the manner in which all the elements of the design empathetically link back to the grand old home.







The home was built in 1907. The owner constructed a row of stables behind the house and was, according to reports, fond of hitching up his horse and buggy and enjoying the sights of the still semi-rural area.

The client's offices are now housed in what was the original stable block. The upper storeys of the house and office are linked by a recently constructed walkway and verandah that has proved to be a delightful entertainment area. However, the garden below was damp and unattractive due to the heavy shade of a towering Horse Chestnut tree, *Aesculus hippocastanum*, that is probably as old as the house itself. Jan was commissioned to re-design this area.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To provide an attractive outlook from the elevated entertainment area, without sacrificing the historically significant tree.









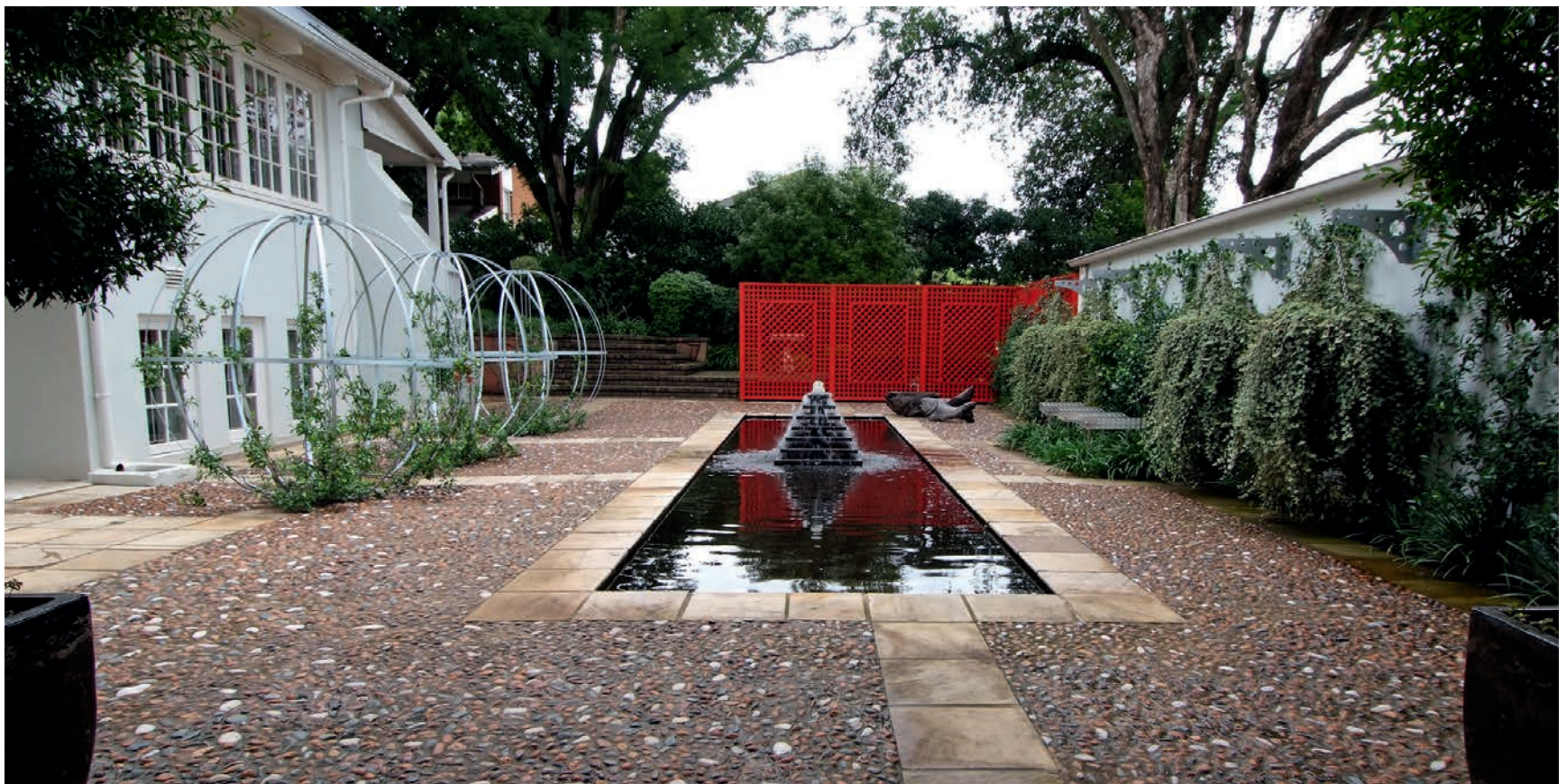
The long, narrow space, embraced by the home and office, was re-worked into two terraces linked by a generous flight of stairs. A long, reflective pool punctuates the upper terrace, with a contemporary, slatted, black granite fountain as its centrepiece. Reflected light off the water lightens the area, and has introduced a new energy into this space.

Volcanic red lattice screens create a dramatic backdrop for the classic water feature, at the same time appealing to the client's love of vibrant colour. The beautiful screens feature Victorian detailing in their outer frames of square apertures, with diamond-shapes in the centre inlays.

Sandstone tiles edge the water feature and the stairs to the lower terrace. A solid row of tiles leads to the pool along the axis set by the majestic tree. For the rest, Jan chose one of his favourite floor surfaces – generous squares of multi-coloured pressed pebble inlay. The colour variation in the pebbles visually softens the surface.

OPPOSITE The client added her own touch to the water feature by introducing three unusual carved wooden fish that she purchased in neighbouring Swaziland. Jan is happy for his clients to add their personal touch to the design.

BELOW The slender water feature lies on a dominant axis that runs through the space, culminating in the dramatic volcanic red wooden screens. Guests have an elevated view of this tranquil yet dynamic setting, where ever-changing reflections leave one mesmerised.







ABOVE Three galvanised, bowed steel spheres add a touch of frivolity to an otherwise tranquil area. The gentle climber *Trachelospermum jasminoides* still allows the spheres to 'breathe'.

The stately tree, whose shade caused the initial problem, is finally acknowledged with a raised 'love bench' that surrounds its majestic trunk. The planter behind the bench makes use of the original soil level around the base of the tree.

Three galvanised spheres designed by Jan continue the contemporary theme, adding a sculptural dimension. Fragrant *Trachelospermum jasminoides* slowly threads itself through the frames, rendering them a work-in-progress. The frames are softly lit at night, which, the client says, adds a truly magical touch, especially when viewed from upstairs in the home.





A simple palette of plants dresses this exquisite garden. Star Jasmine (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) infuses the night air with its subtle perfume; the small-leafed ivy, *Hedera helix* 'Little Diamond', fills the hanging baskets; miniature white *Agapanthus praecox* surrounds the stylish bench, while *Liriope muscari* 'Evergreen Giant' tucks into the planter around the base of the grand old Horse Chestnut tree.

The client enjoys nothing more than to sit beside the water feature and read. Jan commissioned a comfortable and modern clear Perspex bench for her that is positioned between the decorative hanging baskets.

ABOVE LEFT Elements of wood and stone cladding beneath the verandah link back to the original materials used in the home. A repeat of the red screens also establishes a visual link to those on the opposite end of the reflective pool.

TOP Sturdy, galvanised wall brackets support hanging baskets filled with variegated ivy, *Hedera helix* 'Little Diamond'.

BOTTOM The unusual Perspex bench installed for the client's reading retreat.









# Carlton *Gardens*

*T*he Berea, a fashionable residential suburb of Durban, is perched on the crest of a ridge overlooking the city centre, the harbour and the Indian Ocean. An eclectic mix of architectural styles exists here, from Victorian to Edwardian and Art Deco, attesting to the colonial era when Durban was still a British outpost. While the profile of the suburb has certainly changed in recent years, its residents are still mostly wealthy, with young professionals moving into these old, characterful homes and restoring them to their former glory. The Berea is conveniently situated to some of Durban's finest schools, fabulous shopping malls and fashionable restaurants and outdoor cafés.

**CLIENT BRIEF** This involved three separate projects, and Jan's involvement spanned several years: firstly to refurbish the driveway and approach to the front entrance of the home; secondly to resize the swimming pool; and lastly, to re-design the area once occupied by the tennis court.





ABOVE A formal water feature, housing the clients' koi fish, is a delightful centrepiece in the courtyard that links the home, gym and garden pavilion. Jan's designs always make provision for additional seating around the water features.

OPPOSITE As the rising sun bathes the home in a warm glow, Iceberg roses in generous terracotta planters soften the length of the front verandah with its dramatic black and white flooring.

This gracious old home in a quiet, tree-lined street on the Berea, was built by the Union-Castle Mail Steamship Company in 1902, two years after it came into service, to house its top personnel. In those days there was an uninterrupted view from the house to the harbour. A telescope was trained on the harbour mouth from the upstairs verandah and the arrival of one of the Union-Castle's conspicuous, lavender-hulled liners would send staff scuttling to greet the ship.





The present owners purchased the property in 2000, at which time, they say, the house was still in excellent condition. It retains much of the original detail, such as the intricate wrought-iron balustrade and the pristine black-and-white floor tiles that adorn the verandah. All that required serious attention was the garden.

A mature Natal Mahogany tree (*Trichelia emetica*), positioned at the entrance off the street, could probably fill in the blanks regarding this home's early history. What is known is that the original plot of land was considerably larger than it is today, and that a row of stables stood adjacent to the existing garages.





ABOVE RIGHT Royal Palms (*Roystonea regia*) add stature to the landscape and match the vertical scale of this imposing home on its modest plot. The charcoal cobblestone softens the expanse of hard surface around the front entrance.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The well-appointed garden pavilion is covered with the prolific-flowering climbing rose, Lamarque. It is important to apply greenery to buildings not attached directly to the home so that they blend with the garden.

In keeping with the historical relevance of the house, Jan chose a charcoal cobblestone for the driveway and circular parking area, reminiscent perhaps of the cobbled streets in the port cities in England with which the original occupants might have been associated. The cobble echoes the shape and size of the black-and-white tiles on the verandah, while the charcoal colour softens both the expanse of paving and the crisp white house with its black detail. A customised sandstone water feature is the centrepiece in front of the home.

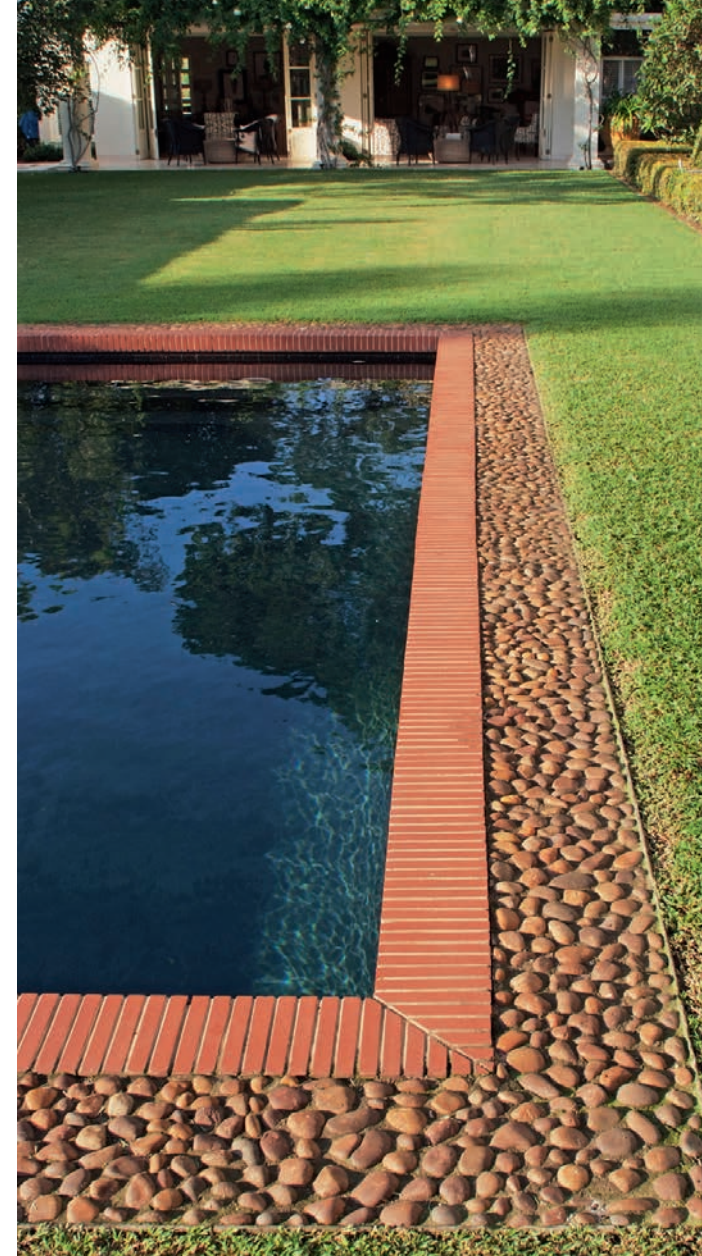




The swimming pool at the front of the house was originally twice the length it is today. The size of the pool was reduced and, inspired by British garden designer David Hicks's own pool, Jan edged the pool with an unusual combination of slim brick coping and a pressed pebble surround. The sea-blue pool throws spectacular reflections throughout the day, and its reduced size no longer overwhelms the front garden. Loosely shaped garden beds along the boundary were replaced with an immaculately maintained hedge. Double layers of clipped greenery around the wrap-around verandah keep this narrow area uncluttered and reinforce the strong linear aspect of the design.

The existing tennis court's fate was sealed when, after a two-year probation, the owners' children failed to show any interest in the game. The court was demolished, giving way to a well-appointed private gymnasium, a garden pavilion and a rose garden, catering for the needs of each member of the family.

The central courtyard that links the home with the gym and the pavilion is designed, not as a thoroughfare, but as an intimate, contemplative garden, filled with fragrant roses and a formal koi water feature.



TOP The classical pool with inspired detail is in perfect proportion to the grand home. Luxuriant Cynodon lawn leads the eye to the garden pavilion, which is set on an axis with the pool.





ABOVE AND OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The scrambling climber, *Petrea volubilis*, ties this grand home to its elevated landscape. Beautiful detail in the intricate wrought-iron balustrades is a feature of the upper verandah.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT An acid-washed Anduze urn, filled with summer-flowering *Agapanthus praecox*, sits proudly on its plinth alongside the garden pavilion.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM The canopy of the Natal Mahogany, *Trichelia emetica*, and the fronds of an elegant Royal Palm, frame the vista of the city centre from the driveway. The homes opposite were once part of the original estate.

Stairs from the home lead down into this central courtyard. Oversized pavers, interplanted with *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Kyoto', create an interesting surface. Four boxed gardens are filled with hybrid tea roses in pink, yellow and white. A classic Lutyens-style bench overlooks the courtyard from its elevated plinth.

In this area, Anduze and terracotta urns brim with blue *Agapanthus* that flower abundantly in the summer. Black-and-white pressed pebble detail on either side of the pavilion's verandah serves as a visual reminder of the adornment around the home.













# East *Meets West*

Louis and Chrisi van Loon's home is another of those situated on Durban's elevated Berea in KwaZulu-Natal, and overlooks the beautiful woodland setting of Jameson Park. Their garden is an intimate, spiritual sanctuary reflecting a fusion of Eastern philosophy and African elements.

Louis initiated the Buddhist Institute of South Africa and introduced Buddhist studies at the universities of both Cape Town and Durban-Westville. He and his wife, Chrisi, opened the Buddhist retreat in Ixopo, KwaZulu-Natal, to the public in 1980, and are still actively involved in its daily running.

An accomplished architect, Louis purchased the Berea property some 45 years ago as office space for his firm. Years later, he sub-divided the land and converted the original house to combine both office and living space. Much of the expansive garden was lost in the sub-division and all that remained was a narrow, sloping section of lawn in the front of the house with little space to entertain.





OPPOSITE Solid Burmese teak pillars with their intricately carved details frame the elegant planters that provide focal points for the rooms inside. The raised timber edging retains the slender planting of *Chondropetalum tectorum*.

ABOVE Water moves effortlessly into the lower pool through the copper spouts.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To redesign the front garden and provide an area for relaxation and entertainment. The client requested a predominantly indigenous garden to attract birds. The garden also needed to reflect their Buddhist philosophy.

The Van Loons commissioned Jan to design and install their garden, as they had viewed his work and enjoyed his sense of space and design. Louis and Jan worked together on their ideas for a design solution for the front garden.

Once the area had been cleared, balau wooden decking was installed along the length of the house, expanding the area significantly and transforming the previously sloping area into a generous space. Elements of water, wood and stone feature throughout, reflecting characteristics of eastern and African heritage.







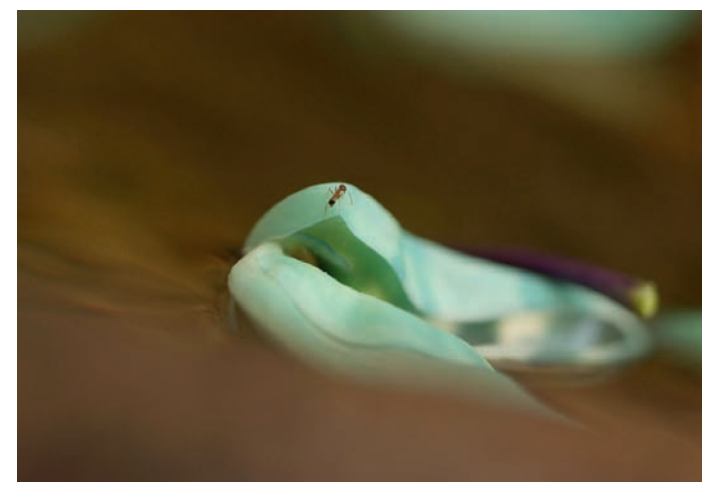


OPPOSITE MAIN *Cycas revoluta* punctuate the opposite ends of the water feature.

The crouching figure of the Lion-Frog has found its home in the gravel garden positioned opposite the lounge window. The sculpture symbolises strength and good fortune, two of the greatest attributes in the Chinese ancient nature mysticism, Taoism. Moving away from the traditional raked gravel garden, the design combines a mix of river gravel and tumbled sandstone with interruptions of textured greenery such as *Aloe barbae*, *Aloe ferox*, *Juncus kraussii* and *Echeveria elegans*. A double framework of timber, inlaid with *Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Kyoto' (Dwarf Mondo Grass) softens the gravel area. The couple enjoy the outlook from the lounge window onto this section of garden.







Chrisi is a keen birder and loves indigenous plants. She is particularly delighted that the *Aloe barbarae* has become a 'bird condominium', with constant activity as tiny Mannekin birds build their nests with fronds from an existing bamboo palm against the house, collect seed from the indigenous grasses and drink from the water in the grinding-stone.







The garden is pleasantly cool, despite Durban's steamy, sub-tropical climate. Existing *Strelitzia nicolii* (Wild Banana) on the boundary and a magnificent *Acacia xanthophloea* (Fever Tree) cast filtered shade over the garden. The combination of shade and constantly moving water functions as an air-conditioner, explains Louis, which has made a significant change in the temperature indoors as the garden has matured.

Custom-made wooden screens create privacy from the neighbours and disguise the utility area. The horizontal lines of the slats create the illusion of depth, while their varying widths soften their impact.

ABOVE An image of the Bodhisattva, Kwan Yin, was carved for the clients in China, and represents the ideal of unconditional compassion in the Chinese Buddhist tradition. She is shown as female with rich clothing and jewellery to depict the various 'ornaments' that compassion carries with it such as loving-kindness, equanimity and impartiality.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT Lesotho riverstone was used to clad the water feature. The same stone was used on the exterior of the home, facing the water feature, linking home and garden.













# Colonial *Elegance*

*P*erched on the Berea overlooking Durban's city centre is a gracious, KwaZulu-Natal verandah-style home.

The original house, part of a deceased estate when the current owners first viewed it, had been standing vacant for some time. Despite signs of neglect, the house had many redeeming features: a prime location with wonderful views, and it retained many of the characteristics of its architectural vernacular, such as high ceilings and black-and-white flooring. The garden was a typical 1970s tropical style, yet it showed great potential.

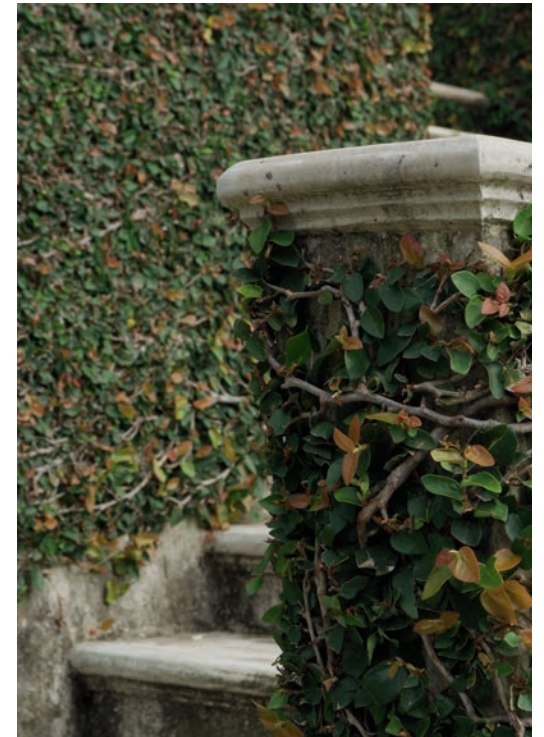
Jan worked closely with the architect, interior designer and the owners on the renovations to the house, ensuring that the end-product suited the owners' requirements of a comfortable family home with a perfect flow between in- and outdoors.

**CLIENT BRIEF** Jan was asked to create a garden that suited the verandah-style design of this refurbished home. A series of unsatisfactory levels in the garden also required his expertise.









The garden was stripped bare, with the exception of some of the more mature trees. It required extensive earthworks to remedy the impractical terraces. This included backfilling the exposed basement walls, so that the top terrace could sit comfortably against the wrap-around verandah in front of the house.

Due to the quantity of soil that was added to form a new level around the house, there was disparity between the upper and lower terraces. To counter this, Jan designed a series of retaining walls incorporating a formal staircase that leads from the upper terrace to the expanse of lawn below.

Left in their exposed state, these imposing retaining walls would have dominated the entire front garden. Clever planting and design techniques, however, have transformed this feature into the signature piece of the home. The creeping fig, *Ficus pumila*, is gradually disguising the walls, and is clipped regularly to expose the formal flight of stairs and the bull-nose capping to the walls.





TOP Masks of Neptune pour water into the tranquil ponds filled with Louisiana Irises.

Water energises the structure as it spills gently from classical Neptune masks into ponds that stretch along the base of the lower wall. The edges of these receptacles are softened with the precision-cut greenery, punctuated with golden-yellow, clipped obelisks.

A beautifully maintained lawn on the lower terrace provides the owners' daughters with plenty of space to play sporting games with their friends. To gain an expanse of lawn, the original swimming pool on this terrace was covered, at Jan's suggestion, with concrete slabs and now functions as a reservoir for all the run-off water from the roof. It services the entire irrigation system.







OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The white window frames and black shutters are reminiscent of a bygone era.

OPPOSITE TOP RIGHT The owners have encouraged the creeping fig to cover the white walls and ceiling of the verandah.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM Comfortable furnishings on the verandah are an invitation to outdoor living. The broad verandah also acts as an air-conditioner for the home – an aspect for which it is worth sacrificing some indoor light.

A new, classical swimming pool is situated behind the house, sheltered by high walls and the home's generous wrap-around verandah. This is where the family spends most of their leisure time.

Many elements of the design are repeated throughout the garden, ensuring continuity and a clear link between the two sections of garden.











ABOVE The home has beautiful views over the city to the ocean. The Princess Palms are an intrinsic component of a typical colonial Durban garden.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT The outline of the upper terrace is framed by hedges of *Duranta erecta* 'Sheena's Gold' and round-trimmed *Westringia fruticosa*. An unusual topiary clipped from *Syzigium paniculatum* takes centre-stage at the front door. The owners credit their specialist maintenance crew with the immaculate state of their garden.

The plant material is again confined to a few star performers – *Syzigium paniculatum* and the smaller variety, *Syzigium globulum*, for dark green foliage; *Murray exotica* for mid-green and *Duranta erecta* 'Sheena's Gold' for a striking yellow-gold contrast. In the front garden Daylilies (*Hemerocallis* spp.) and potted *Agapanthus praecox* add a splash of colour, while roses growing on the lower terrace provide summer flowers for the vase.



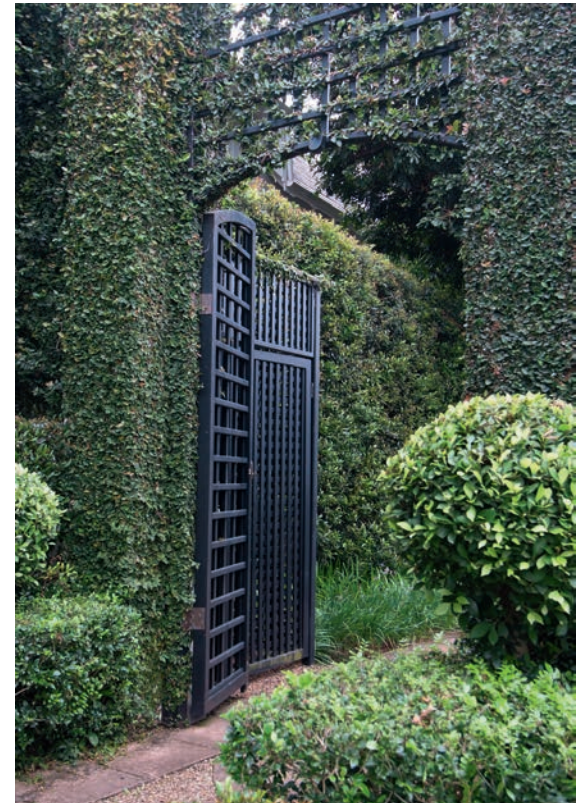


Princess Palms, *Dictyosperma album* var. *album*, line two sides of the lawn on the lower terrace, and feature again around the swimming pool, their symmetrical layout creating a sense of formality. These palms are an intrinsic characteristic of an old Durban colonial garden.









LEFT An old municipal lamppost, unearthed during excavations on the property, is centred along the path leading from the pool to the front garden.

ABOVE Tall lattice gates match the proportions of the house. Painted black, they blend with the dark foliage of the creeper.









# Contemporary *Living*

*M*embers of a close-knit Durban family made the decision to live in close proximity to one another. They acquired a beautiful piece of land and built four magnificent homes, one for the patriarch and the others for the siblings and their families.

The land is situated in Westville, with panoramic views of the Indian Ocean to the east and, to the west, the well-wooded landscape of the Palmiet Nature Reserve.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To provide a landscape befitting the contemporary architecture and to ensure a sense of individuality and privacy for each home.









LEFT Geometrically-shaped, raised planters define the open area in front of the four homes. The formal hedge of *Syzigium paniculatum* adds a strong contemporary line to the design.

The challenge to Jan with this brief was to ensure continuity across the space, while at the same time providing privacy for each of the homes. The proportions of the buildings are immense, impacted further by the elevated and exposed position of the property.

Jan's design firstly defines the extent of the open area that spans the four homes. A continuous low but raised planter, clad with the same sandstone used throughout the architecture, frames the verdant lawn. Across this expanse, cheerful yellow Daylilies predominate against the backdrop of a low hedge of *Syzigium paniculatum*.





RIGHT Oversized benches echo the massive proportions of the buildings. Each concrete plinth supports a cantilevered, pressed laminate timber seat.

To lend a sense of the unique, each space is defined separately, incorporating individual features. Taking into account the proportions of the site as well as the buildings, Jan chose dramatic features to provide a feeling of balance. Four frosted polycarbonate planters are placed across the expanse of garden, each one lit from within to create a magical atmosphere at night.









BELOW This stylish, Italian-designed, covered seater is poised on the raised timber deck, overlooking the private sports field below and the tree canopy of the nearby nature reserve.

OPPOSITE TOP This indoor seating area is a perfect study in contrasts – the rich, warm tones of the wood against the sleek, cool stainless steel; the vertical lines of timber in the furniture, offset by the strong horizontal lines of the screens and decking.

The composition is further enhanced by the textured grey wall as a backdrop and the frame of smooth, grey pebbles on the ground.

Oversized benches were designed to echo these massive proportions. Each concrete plinth supports a cantilevered, pressed laminate timber seat. The unusual design complements the contemporary, imported interior furnishings.

A combination of Vetiver Grass (*Vetiveria zizanioides*) and Daylilies provides a soft, yet effective screening for each home, again within a framework of raised planters. Timber walkways encourage movement between each unit, especially for the younger members of this extended family, who put the garden to good use.















Each home has an individually styled swimming pool. Timber and sandstone predominate to create a warm, contemporary setting.





OPPOSITE The steep bank is covered with a variety of indigenous grasses, transforming a difficult area into a paradise for grassland birds. This small patch of grassland in suburbia is a wonderful extension to the Palmiet Nature Reserve across the valley. An additional benefit is that the slope requires no maintenance whatsoever.

Strong, harsh wind is always a problem on such an elevated site, so great care was taken with the ultimate choice of plant material. The low hedge lessens the effect of the wind, as does the scented jasmine creeper (*Trachelospermum jasminoides*) that grows along the fence above the driveway entrance.

Sturdy and majestic *Celtis africana* (White Stinkwood) is repeated across the garden which, when mature, will provide a vertical element and welcome shade.







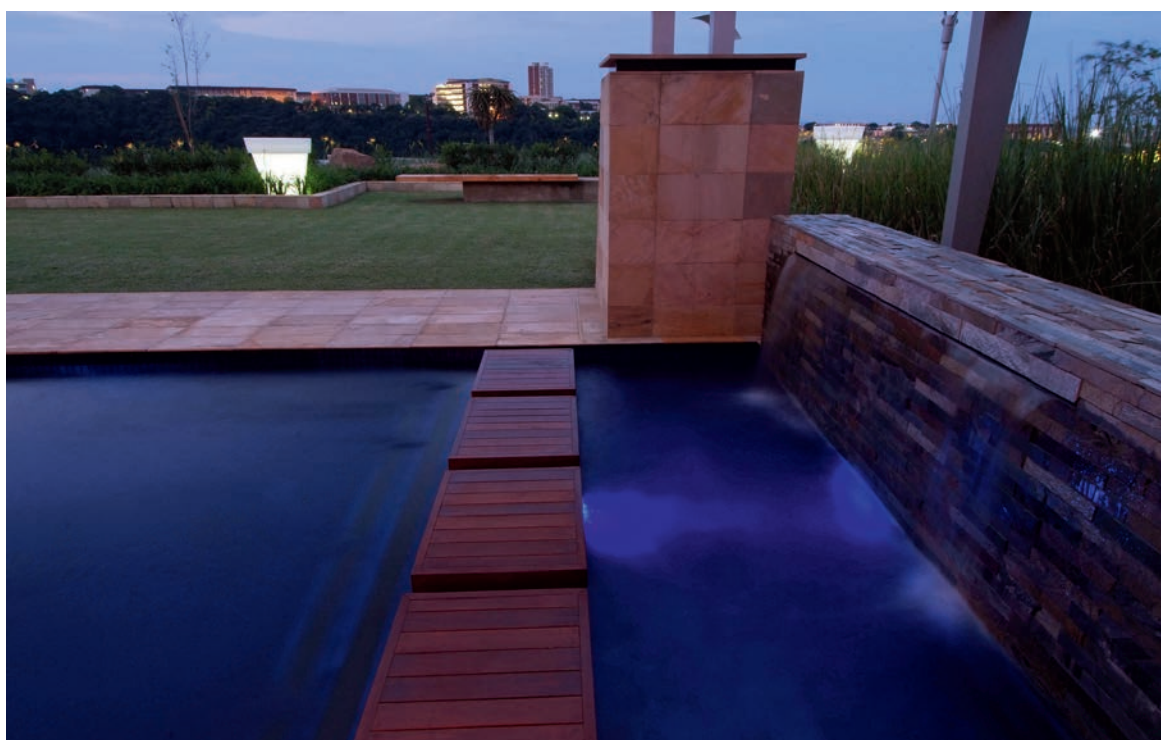
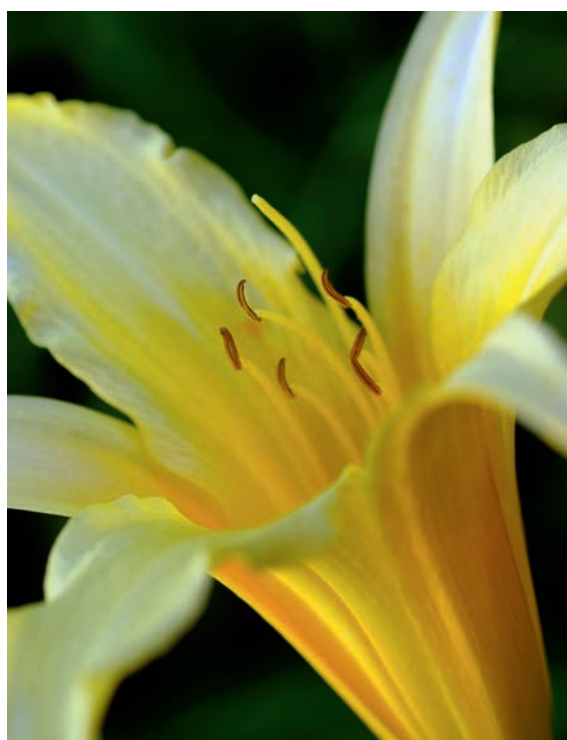
The striking architecture of the homes stands out sharply against a brilliant blue sky. The banks are layered with a species of *Eragrostis* and *Aristida junciformis* and filled with *Carpobrotus deliciosus* (Sour Fig) on the lower levels. These grasses attract a variety of seed-eating birds.















Sculptural *Aloe ferox* and *A. barbarae* are already impacting on the skyline. Their waxy, succulent leaves tolerate strong wind and heat, as do the grass species used to cover the slope below the terrace. A mixed planting of *Dietes grandiflora*, one of the species of *Eragrostis*, *Aristida junciformus* and *Carpobrotus deliciosus* cover the bank, the plumes of the grasses shimmering in the sunlight.

ABOVE Plantings of *Celtis Africana* (White Stinkwood), *Aloe ferox* and *A. barbarae* are silhouetted against the early evening sky.









LEFT A shallow pebble pool surrounding the entrance reflects the dramatic proportions of the contemporary architecture.









# Serenity

*T*he well-wooded suburb of Westville is situated just outside Durban's city centre at an altitude of 269 metres above sea level. Named in honour of the first Lieutenant-Governor of the then British colony of Natal, Martin West, the fertile area was once an active farming community and the Westville Hotel was a popular stop-over for travellers between Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The Palmiet River runs through Westville and supports a variety of smaller wildlife such as the blue duiker, spotted genet, mongoose, troops of vervet monkeys and an incredible variety of bird life.

Much of the terrain is on sloping land, with soft well-draining soil. Westville experiences the full impact of the sub-tropical climate along the east coast of South Africa.

Here, an elegant home with its clapboard exterior belongs to existing clients of Jan. He first designed their garden as one of his earliest projects and it was now due for a revamp.

**CLIENT BRIEF** To both revive a tired garden and develop a new entertainment area adjacent to the home.









The clients' property lies on sloping land. Initially, an informal bank separated the upper terrace, where the house is located, from the lower terrace with its old-fashioned 'picnic pool' – the owners' endearing term for the swimming pool, because it was so far from the house that 'one needs to pack a picnic'. A broad, sweeping staircase, built by Jan's builder-father, Willem Blok, connected these terraces.

With Jan's inimitable skill for re-organising spaces, he advocated demolishing the existing organic-shaped pool and constructing a classical rectangular pool adjacent to the home. The lower terrace could then be levelled and re-designed in order to create an enhanced view from the home.

The owners concurred with Jan's suggestion, and so the extensive renovations to the garden began. Once the new pool was completed, a low wall around the existing patio was also demolished, allowing patio and pool to merge into a generous entertainment area. Indian sandstone pavers in warm, earthy tones were used to pave the entire area.



LEFT The blue-grey marbelite finish to the pool creates a tranquil setting in which to entertain. Single spouts of water arc into the pool at each of its corners.





ABOVE The pyramid topiaries set into the lawn create a sense of structure and rhythm.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT Bamboo Palms hint at a tropical climate in an otherwise classical garden. When one of the existing palms was transplanted, Jan's team discovered a vintage 1920s car buried beneath the palm!

Two mature Leopard Trees (*Caesalpinia ferrea*) were left to throw their much-needed shade over what would otherwise be an uncomfortably hot garden. The patchy lawn on either side of the new patio was lifted and replaced with sandstone pavers, placed on the diagonal and interplanted with the low-growing Mondo Grass (*Ophiopogon japonicus* 'Kyoto'). This effect softens the predominance of hard surfaces and suggests a change of pace.

The new two-metre-high wall, built to retain the bank between the two terraces, ties in beautifully with the original staircase. Masses of giant agapanthus (*Agapanthus praecox*) cover the bank, presenting a sea of blue flowers during the summer months.

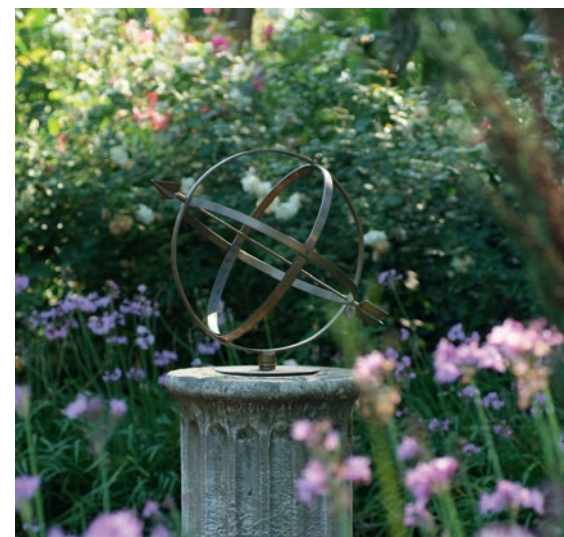




The lower terrace is now a delightful play on form and structure, and is filled with features that please the eye.

Cobbled edging defines the shape of the lawn, which is framed with a low, clipped hedge of *Syzigium globulum*, and, behind it, a loose hedge of the fragrant *Murraya exotica*. Pyramid-shaped topiaries stand proud at each corner, and elegant urns filled with white Bougainvillea are positioned on a central axis to the landing.

Matching elegant Lutyens-style benches square off across the length of the lawn; one set into a recess in the retaining wall and the other against the backdrop of a crisp white lattice screen.







BELOW The delicate white spires of the indigenous *Plectranthus ecklonii* 'Tommy' provide a gentle backdrop to the Lutyens-style bench against the lattice screen. Soft afternoon light filters through the canopy of the neighbouring trees, highlighting features of the garden in the sun's trajectory.

A major drawback was the unsightly view over the neighbouring municipal reservoir. Lush, mature Bamboo Palms (*Chrysiladocarpus lutescens*) were introduced along the length of the lower boundary, and have successfully disguised the view without creating a dense barrier.

At the base of the sweeping staircase, one is greeted by a circular rose garden. White Iceberg roses mingle with the pinks of 'Pearl of Bedfordview', 'Garden and Home' and 'Johannesburg Garden Club', while the delicate mauve flowers of *Tulbachia violaceae* fringe the circle.

A walkway framed by a series of arches leads off the landing of the stairs to a secluded fern garden. Here, tucked away, a birdbath allows the many garden birds to bathe in peace, away from the ever-vigilant Fudge, the family feline.







ABOVE An armillary sphere, mounted on a fluted plinth and surrounded by pink and white blooms, is a strong focal point in the rose garden.

LEFT As a signature piece, a formal water feature greets visitors at the front entrance. Water spills out of a classic urn into the rectangular basin. The background planting of white Iceberg roses softens the feature.









# Reflected *Elegance*

Soft sprays of water, combined with the subtle perfume of roses, gives no hint of this garden's history.

A show-stopper in its heyday, this gracious Kloof property was once filled with a collection of brazen tropical plants that were fashionable back then. The garden won several prestigious awards, and played host to many admiring members of the public.

**CLIENT BRIEF** When the new owners purchased this property, the garden was in need of a revamp and the tennis court had fallen into a state of disrepair. They commissioned Jan to remove the court and replace it with a stylish feature that would rejuvenate the garden.





PREVIOUS SPREAD The timeless design of this superb water feature makes use of subtle changes in level and a repetition of the classical lines throughout. The slender bricks used in the herringbone pattern are standard clay bricks that were painstakingly halved. Bull-nose detail features on the coping around the rectangular pond, the terrace edge and the plinth on which the Lutyens-style bench sits.

ABOVE The musical tones of the multi-layered water spout invite the visitor to explore the origin of the sound.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT Select statement pieces adorn the water feature. The enquiring glance of this cherub at the rose garden beyond draws one's attention to that area.

The neglected tennis court spanned almost the full width of the property on the bottom terrace. An informal sleeper path wound through the lush foliage, linking the home with the court and an informal pavilion set into the sloping bank, where guests could relax and watch a game in progress.

Once the court was demolished, it left bare an expanse that demanded a dramatic feature. Working with the proportions of the pavilion, Jan designed a formal garden with a classic water feature as its centrepiece. The pavilion was restyled as a summerhouse, where the new owners could entertain friends or share a quiet moment together.







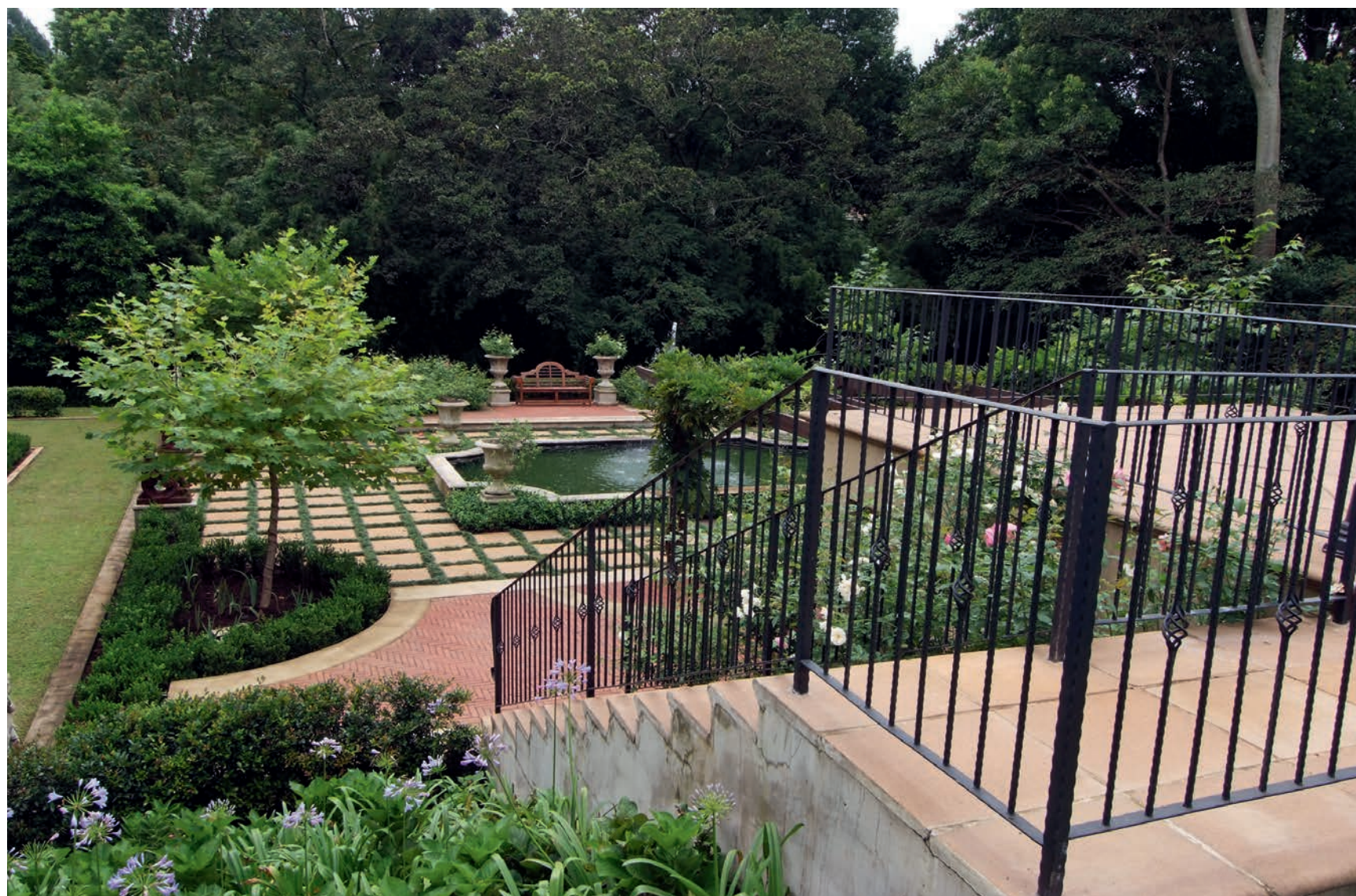




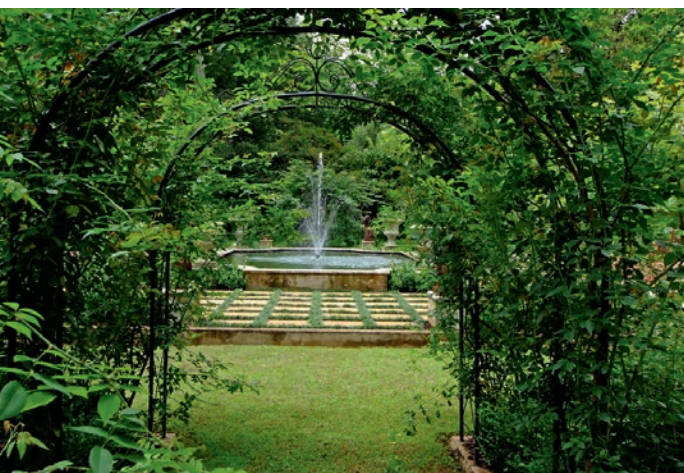
A viewing deck was added to the flat roof of the summerhouse, providing breathtaking views over the new garden. Here sandstone tiles echo the tones of the hard surfaces below, while an elegant wrought-iron balustrade frames the deck and two flights of stairs on either side of the structure leading to the garden below.

The entire design is a play on the shape of the water feature. The design lines are repeated throughout the garden, on the copings of the hard surfaces as well as in the shape of the surrounding beds.

BELOW A flight of stairs leads from the viewing deck to the garden below. The bank on either side of the stairs is planted with blue *Agapanthus praecox* and contained with a hedge of blue hydrangeas. Each scallop in the paving encircles a pollarded London Plane tree that provides some shade during the heat of the day.





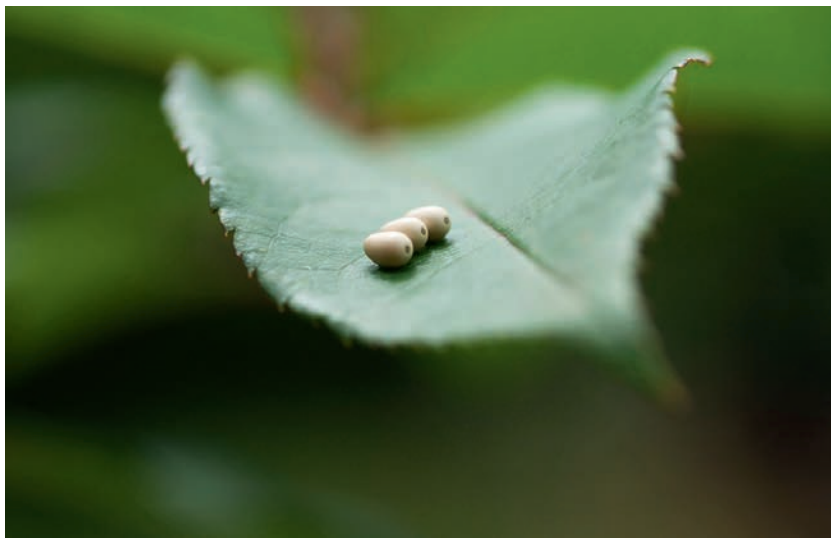


A key element of this formal garden is the subtle yet regular change in levels. Every aspect of the design requires either a step up or a step down, not only emphasising the various features, but also enhancing the experience of movement through the garden.

Various items of ornamentation are featured. Cherubs adorn the paved area around the water feature, while elegant classical urns flank the Lutyens-style bench and punctuate each corner of the water feature.

Clipped hedges of *Buxus sempervirens* edge the formal rose beds that are filled with pink and white rose cultivars. Generous arches, covered with the pearl-white rose, Lamarque, invite one to explore the rose garden.





This new section of garden is set against the backdrop of mature trees and shrubs. Except for the pink and white roses, the palette of plants is an understated mix of green with the occasional show of white or mauve flowers. *Wisteria sinensis* covers the pergola, casting its dappled shade onto the terrace. *Trachelospermum jasminoides* forms a low hedge around the water feature and fills the classical urns.

Superb craftsmanship and attention to detail have indeed rejuvenated the space previously occupied by the tennis court, honouring the award-winning status that was accorded the garden.

OPPOSITE TOP A classical urn acts as the focal point of the rose garden. *Buxus sempervirens* frames each of the rose beds.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM The intricately worked metal arches leading into the rose garden frame the jubilant spray of water.









# Panoramic *Views*

*M*any of Durban's prestigious apartment blocks are situated on the Berea with elevated views over the CBD and the ocean. In this instance, the client's apartment was situated below the rooftop and not on the same level. The client had already carried out major renovations to his apartment, in the process removing certain essential supports that would have allowed the roof to bear additional weight. As most of these apartment blocks were designed with little thought to accommodating rooftop gardens, the situation created a potential construction problem.

Unlike the project on page 29, this one did not present Jan with a blank canvas. The roof is a minefield of air-conditioning units, geysers and light wells running the entire height of the building.

**CLIENT BRIEF** Jan was commissioned to design a rooftop garden above the client's exclusive apartment to fulfil the interior designer's concept for a stylish entertainment area with exceptional views over the city and the Indian Ocean.



To gain access to the roof, a section of concrete slab was removed to install the staircase. Natural light from above now floods the space, illuminating the stainless steel balustrade with its toughened glass treads.

The entire design comprises lightweight materials such as timber decking and screens, gravel, synthetic turf and shallow-rooting plants. A hardwood walkway, set at varying levels, leads to the main deck that opens to magnificent views over the city. The shape of the walkway was suggested by the client's interior designer. This became the template for the garden, around which Jan designed a striking contemporary outdoor entertainment area.

It was necessary to screen this garden from the view of surrounding apartments and to create an intimate space for the client.

PREVIOUS SPREAD The viewing deck of this Durban rooftop garden is set below the level of the main deck.

BELOW LEFT A stylish, canopied daybed in neutral taupe complements the accessories chosen for the garden.

BELOW RIGHT A stainless steel and glass staircase leads to 'The garden in the sky' (*Jardin dans le ciel*). A glass canopy protects it from the elements and allows natural light to flood down onto the landing.







Timber screens direct the movement in this garden and screen off the utility elements. In addition, they create a sense of privacy for the client. By varying the widths of the slats and recessing every alternate panel, Jan has ensured that the screens do not dominate the space.

A frameless glass balustrade encloses the eastern aspect without obstructing the view. The client was involved in the design and added his own points of interest, suggesting a viewing deck in addition to the main deck with its canopied sunbed. The viewing deck provides ringside seats over Greyville racecourse and the Moses Mabhida Stadium which was constructed for the 2010 World Soccer Cup in South Africa.

ABOVE The circular design of the decking and contemporary accessories soften the linear boundary lines of this rooftop garden. Subdued lighting bathes this area in a soft glow at night, creating the most magical space in which to entertain, especially against the backdrop of the city's lights.





OPPOSITE *Trachelospermum jasminoides* coils around the metal umbrella stands. When the plant fills the umbrella shapes, it will be as effective as a small tree without adding any additional weight to the building.

Contemporary accessories dress this garden. Tall planters in neutral tones flank the main deck while three white, frosted pots, fitted with glass tops and internal lights, double as cocktail tables for special occasions.

At night, subdued lighting bathes the garden in a soft glow. Rope lights rim the umbrella stands and highlight the changes in levels along the walkway, while up-down lighters mounted on the screens throw a gentle light. The warm glow from the Italian-design translucent pots also enhances the ambience.

A contemporary, monochromatic planting scheme has been used so as not to detract from the view. The hardy perennial, *Dietes bicolor*, with soft buttercup-yellow flowers, frames the main deck. *Liriope muscari* 'Evergreen Giant' features throughout the raised beds and in the cylindrical planters. *Dianella tasmanica* 'Little Jess' fills the bowl-shaped pots.

A linear water feature dissects the walkway. The movement of the water invites one to pause, just for a moment, before stepping up to the deck with its breathtaking views.









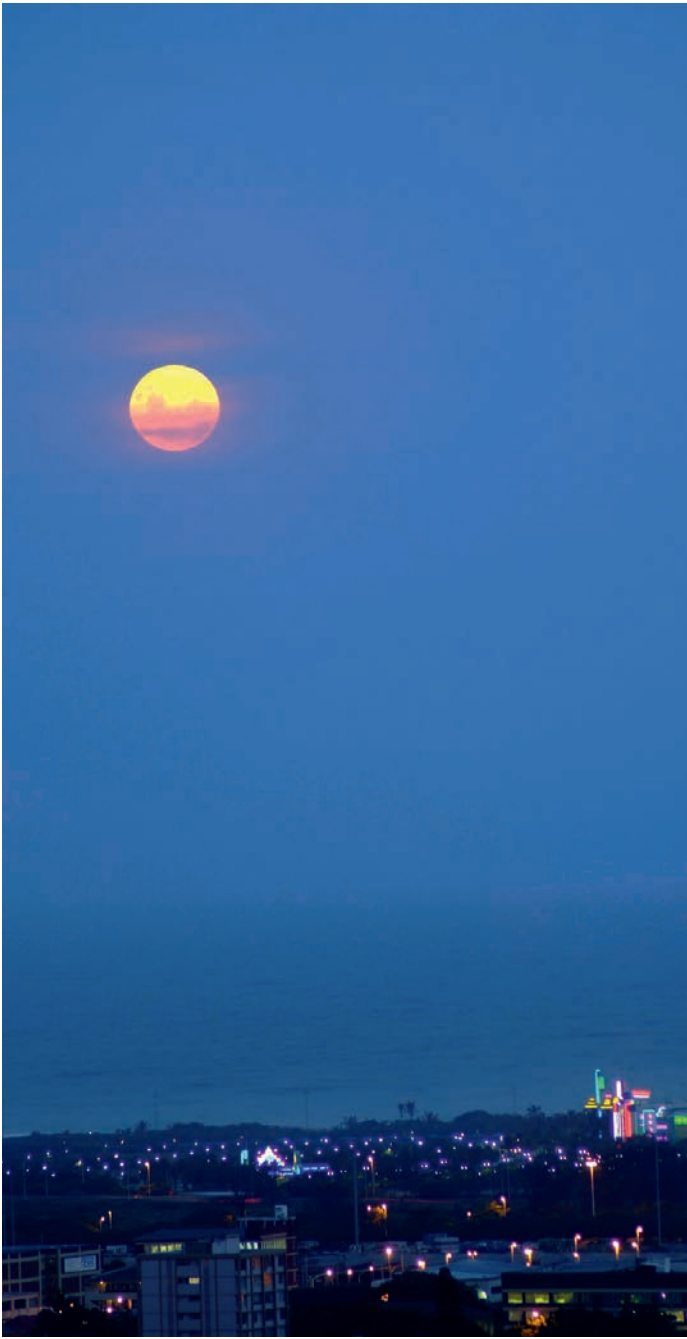
ABOVE A combined play area and putting green is located to the right of the walkway.

OPPOSITE LEFT An outdoor shower was installed for the client with a clear view out to the ocean.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM RIGHT A strong geometric planter, filled with colourful daylilies, intersects the circular putting greens.

The design includes a multi-purpose garden for the client's children. Located in a sheltered area behind the screens lining the walkway, synthetic turf lends a soft surface for play. Jan chose two synthetic surfaces – one suitable for putting and the other for chipping. There is adequate space too for play equipment.













# Toad *Hall*

Jan and Susan Blok chose Hillcrest, KwaZulu-Natal, in which to build their classical, European-style home, Toad Hall. The once-quiet village of Hillcrest was founded in 1895 on a hillock along the main route between Durban and Pietermaritzburg, hence the original spelling Hill Crest. Today it is a thriving suburb, yet the area retains its country charm. For two months in mid-summer the weather is uncomfortable due to the predictable humidity of a sub-tropical summer, but, for the rest of the year, the weather is temperate with the advantage of distinct seasonal changes.

Jan's father, Willem Blok, built Toad Hall just over ten years ago. One could be forgiven, however, for believing that the ivy-clad building was a century old or more. With his renowned attention to detail, Jan has used materials and accessories that suggest a graceful home of a bygone era.





OPPOSITE MAIN The dovecote garden, Susan's favourite, is encircled with lavender against a backdrop of Iceberg roses and Cape May.

Striking ornamentation graces Jan and Susan's garden. The statement urns are mostly cast-iron, with intricate Victorian detail. Reconstituted stone plinths support beautiful, scalloped urns at the front entrance, while elegant carriage lanterns illuminate the garden at night.

The garden is elegant, yet unpretentious. A framework of layered greenery defines the formal design, creating separate, uncluttered spaces for the family to enjoy. Manicured hedges of *Syzigium paniculatum* and vibrant *Duranta erecta* 'Sheena's Gold', against a softer backdrop of the sweet-smelling *Trachelospermum jasminoides*, frame the front garden that adjoins the design office courtyard.





The plant palette is beautiful in its simplicity. Against a background of predominantly dark green foliage, touches of lavender, pink hydrangeas, white Iceberg roses and white agapanthus strike delightful cameos throughout.





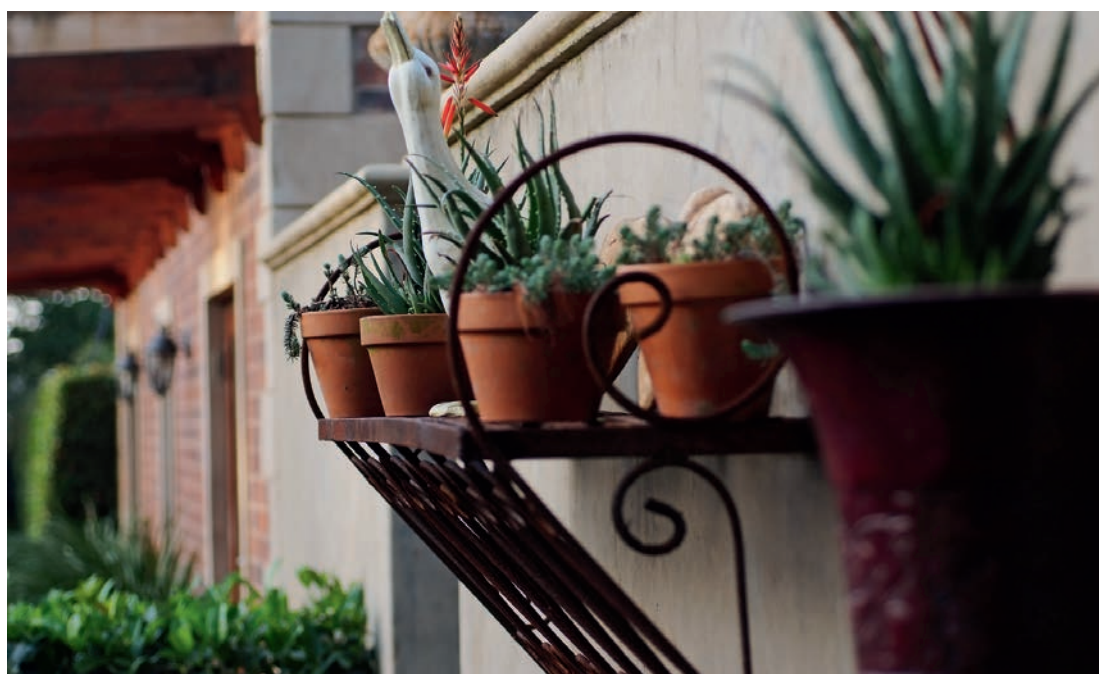
ABOVE London Planes (*Platanus x acerifolia*) are pollarded to provide shade in the heat of the day, while a cosy fire in the oversized fireplace keeps guests warm on a cool evening.

OPPOSITE TOP The retaining walls with their bull-nose detail provide a warm backdrop for both the kitchen courtyard and Jan's design office. The walls have a raw plaster finish that will age to a beautiful patina in time.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT Ornate wrought iron shelves support intriguing ornamentation. Susan changes the accessories throughout the garden regularly to give the various spaces a fresh appeal.

Five graceful *Celtis africana* (White Stinkwood) line the gravel driveway of Toad Hall. Pollarded *Platanus x acerifolia* (London Planes) bring vertical structure to the front garden and the kitchen courtyard. With limited space for any more trees, the garden is fortunate to borrow its shade from mature trees in neighbouring properties. *Halleria lucida* (Tree Fuchsia) spills into the front garden, attracting various species of nectar-loving birds when in flower, while a large *Trichelia emetica* (Natal Mahogany) on the southern perimeter is used as a look-out point by owls and raptors.









ABOVE A wooden picket fence separates the swimming pool from the rest of the garden. The woodwork in the garden is painted in a subtle French grey.

OPPOSITE TOP LEFT Cast-iron planters filled with *Spathyphyllum x hybridum* and white begonias nestle into the luxuriant foliage of the *Hedera helix*. The garden is mostly white and green, with touches of soft pink and lavender.

OPPOSITE BOTTOM LEFT An three-metre steel pyramid, filled with *Virburnum odoratissimum*, takes centre-stage in the design office courtyard.

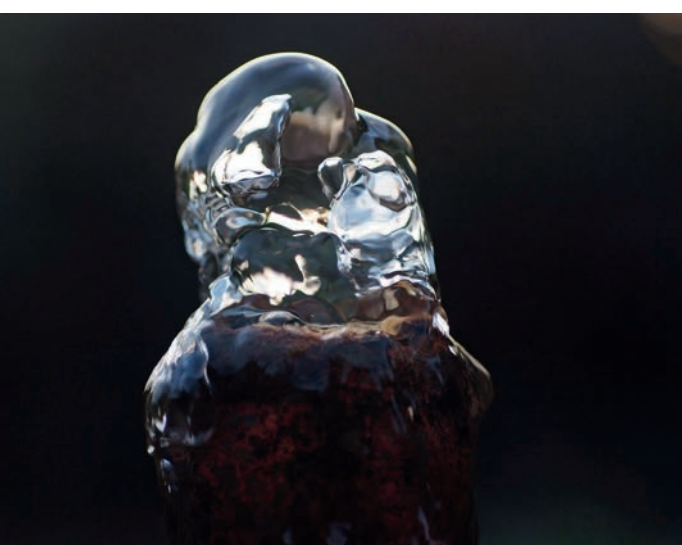
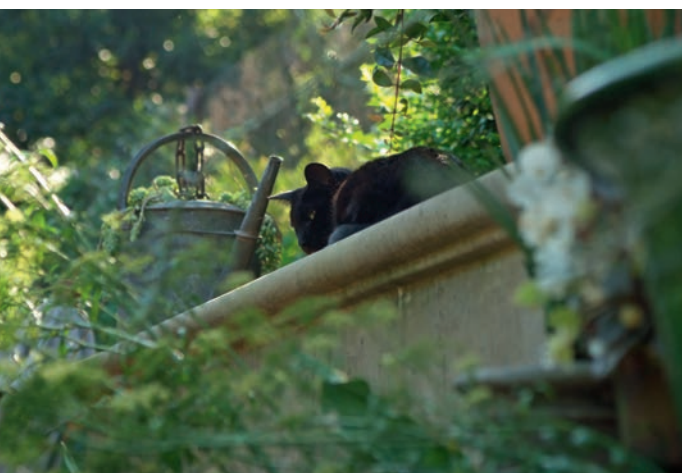
Jan and Susan use their spacious kitchen courtyard with its generous fireplace to entertain their friends and family year round. Surrounding walls two-and-a-half metres in height provide effective protection from the elements.

The east-facing front patio offers a delightfully cool retreat on hot summer afternoons. Jan designed the unusual floor surface to add to the ageing charm of the home. Second-hand clay bricks define generous squares of pressed pebble in different tones. *Wisteria sinensis* covers the pergola throughout summer, and oversized hanging baskets are filled with the dainty *Euphorbia* 'Diamond Frost' and sweet-smelling Alyssum. The tall green *Liriope* 'Evergreen Giant' – a 'no nonsense' plant, as Jan describes it – features in large planters against the wall.













OPPOSITE MAIN Susan designed the striking gate that leads to the design office. It is painted to match the woodwork.

LEFT AND BELOW The front patio is delightfully cool on a hot summer's day. Hanging baskets filled with *Euphorbia* 'Diamond Frost' add a charming touch.











OPPOSITE The *Parthenociccus tricuspidata* (Boston Ivy) covering the front of Jan's home turns a vibrant ruby-red in autumn.

ABOVE The versatile *Plectranthus verticillatus* spills out of the urns flanking the front entrance. This indigenous plant tolerates sun and shade.



## JAN’S FAVOURITE PLANT PALETTE

### Trees:

*Acacia siberiana* (Paperbark Thorn) – used for its textured bark and light green canopy, it provides a wonderful sense of the African landscape. Plants grow happily under the light shade of this tree.

*Acer palmatum*\* (Japanese Maple) – a small, deciduous, feature tree providing understated elegance in the garden. The palmate leaves provide wonderful autumn colour as they prepare to fall.

*Celtis africana* (White Stinkwood) – an indigenous tree with a generic application in tropical, formal or indigenous styles. Providing a medium shade in summer, this semi-deciduous tree allows plenty of sunlight through in the winter.

*Commiphora harveyii* (Peeling Bark Plane) – this tree has a fascinating lime-green bark that peels constantly. Used as a single specimen, it adds a definite point of interest to the landscape.

*Magnolia* ‘Little Gem’\* – Jan considers this the Rolls-Royce of small trees with its dark, glossy foliage and brassy undertone on the underside of the leaf. Saucer-sized white, fragrant flowers burst sporadically into bloom.

*Olea europea* subs. *africana* (African Olive) – used for its grey-green foliage and textured bark, this versatile tree evokes a sense of either an African or Mediterranean landscape.

*Platanus x acerifolia*\* (London Plane) – a large, deciduous tree with a character trunk, used to effect in an avenue planting and also ideal for pollarding to create a canopy effect in a small courtyard.

### Palms:

*Dictyosperma album* var. *album*\* (Princess Palm) – characteristic of a bygone colonial landscape, this is a stylish palm with dark green fronds and a clean silhouette. It is not too tall and works well in a tropical or formal landscape.

*Rhapis excelsa*\* (Lady Palm) – a small, delicate palm with a shrub-like growth. Wonderful as a backdrop planting in a tropical setting.

*Roystonea regia*\* (Cuban Royal Palm) – a statuesque palm with a timeless quality that commands attention, and is imposing on the landscape. It is ideal for a formal, stately garden.

### Shrubs:

*Buddleja saligna* (False Olive) – this shrub can be used as a large shrub or small tree. It adds a Mediterranean feel to the landscape with its slender, silver-green foliage.

*Buxus sempervirens*\* (English Boxwood) – the small, dark green foliage of this shrub makes it an ideal clipping subject for boxed, formal gardens.

*Duranta erecta* ‘Sheena’s Gold’\* – this bright, yellow-gold shrub is also wonderful for clipping and adds impact to the landscape. Use selectively.

*Lavandula* spp\* (Lavender) – a fragrant, Mediterranean sub-shrub grown for its silver-grey, textured foliage and fragrant, lilac flowers.

*Murraya exotica*\* (Orange Jasmine) – with its small, glossy green leaves, this shrub can be used as a clipped or loose hedge. It bears heads of highly fragrant white flowers several times a year.

*Syzigium paniculatum*\* (Australian Brush Cherry) – this tall shrub with its glossy, dark green leaves is ideal as a clipped hedge to create green walls in the garden.

*Viburnum odoratissimum*\* (Sweet Viburnum) – this tall shrub with its stout, green, leathery leaves is used to provide a three-dimensional effect in the garden. It grows fast, and is also an excellent clipping subject.

### Aloes:

*Aloe barbarae* (Tree Aloe) – the tree aloe is a majestic species of aloe with a sculptured silhouette. It grows tall in a tropical or sub-tropical climate.

*Aloe chabaudii* – a medium, ground-hugging aloe with beautiful grey leaves that turn copper in the autumn. It bears tall spires of orange flowers in early winter.

*Aloe ferox* – a single-stem aloe that creates a wonderful silhouette against the skyline, adds a vertical element to the landscape and also provides a wonderful focal point.

### Grasses and grasslike plants:

*Aristida junciformus* (‘Ngongoni’ Grass) – an evocative indigenous grass with a feathery texture. It has lime-green foliage in the summer that turns ‘Grecian blonde’ in winter.

*Chlorophytum saundersiae* (Weeping Anthericum) – this clump-forming perennial with grass-like leaves and drooping umbels of white flowers is excellent for mass planting, and tolerates sun and shade.

*Chondropetalum tectorum* (Thatching Reed) – this feature plant is clump-forming and has a spiky texture. Terminal heads of brown inflorescences make this a desirable plant for any dramatic landscape.

*Juncus krausii* – the Juncus is a more delicate grass with brown seed heads that works well in a mass planting or as a feature in a mixed planting scheme.

*Liriope muscari* ‘Evergreen Giant’\* – Jan describes this soft, lush ‘jungle grass’ as a ‘no-nonsense’ plant that works well as a foreground planting or a feature plant in elegant containers.

*Ophiopogon japonicus* ‘Kyoto’\* (Dwarf Mondo Grass) – this is a dark-green, grass-like ground cover, excellent for planting between pavers.

*Pennisetum setaceum* ‘rubrum’ (Purple African Fountain Grass) – this fine, drooping grass is a beautiful bronze-red in colour, with pink-purple plumes. It is ideal for a background planting or as a specimen plant.

*Vetiveria zizanioides*\* (Vetiver Grass) – a commercial grass used in erosion control, which Jan enjoys using in a domestic landscape in place of formal hedging.

### Form plants:

*Cyathea australis*\* (Australian Tree Fern) – grown for its iconic shape and form.

*Echeveria elegans*\* (Rock Rose) – a small evocative, rosette-shaped succulent ideal for dry and well-draining situations. It has beautiful silver-grey foliage with a rose-red tinge in winter.

*Phormium tenax* ‘Variegata’\* (Variegated New Zealand Flax) – the flax has an erect habit, with spiky sword-like leaves. Jan masses this plant to create a different textured green wall.

*Phytostachys nigra*\* (Black-stemmed Bamboo) – used next to buildings to soften walls with its delicate foliage and feature black canes. This bamboo is not as invasive as other bamboo species.

*Sanseveria cylindrica* (Elephant’s Toothpick) – an interesting plant with stylised form, hence the appropriate name. Use with caution near buildings or hard surfacing.

*Strelitzia reginae* (Crane Flower) – The strelitzia is South Africa’s national flower. Tall orange spikes of crane-like flowers are borne above leathery, dark-green leaves. This plant works well in a tropical or indigenous application.

### Filler Plants (irises, perennials and groundcovers):

*Agapanthus praecox* – a beautiful, clump-forming perennial with heads of white or blue flowers borne on tall stems in mid-summer. Agapanthus transitions effortlessly between a tropical, formal or indigenous landscape.

*Agapanthus africanus* – a smaller, compact relative of *Agapanthus praecox*. Works well in containers.

*Clivia miniata* – a shade-loving, clump-forming perennial with similar-shaped leaves to the Agapanthus. Enjoys the shade and flowers in spring with heads of bright orange flowers.

*Diets grandiflora* (Rain Iris) – a tall, spiky perennial that bears white flowers at different times of the year, depending on the change in atmospheric pressure and impending rain. Ideal for a massed, background planting.

*Diets bicolor* – also with spiky foliage, this plant has more of a drooping habit and bears clusters of pale yellow flowers. Can be used as a specimen plant or in mass plantings.

*Hedera helix*\* (Dark-leaf Ivy) – ideal for covering banks. This groundcover has large, dark green leaves and is impressive when used *en masse*.

*Hemerocallis* spp.\* (Daylilies) – a leafy perennial with flowers in almost any colour. Ideal for mass planting, and works well in any landscape.

*Zantedeschia aethiopica* (Arum Lily) – this elegant, moisture-loving plant bears urn-shaped flowers in summer.

### Creepers and Climbers:

*Ficus pumila*\* (Tickey Creeper) – wonderful for softening and disguising imposing walls and buildings. Must be kept under control in a warm climate.

*Parthenocissus tricuspidata*\* (Boston Ivy) – this creeper, with its palmate-shaped leaf, will reward with its spectacular ruby-red winter foliage.

*Petrea volubulis*\* (Purple Wreath) – a wonderful climber for arbours, arches and unsightly downpipes. Showy sprays of purple flowers cover the plant from spring to summer.

*Rosa* ‘Lemarque’\* – this prolific climbing rose is fast to establish and bears beautiful creamy-white fragrant roses throughout summer.

*Rosa* ‘Iceberg’\* – a prolific floribunda rose with white flowers, this is a favourite in formal gardens.

*Trachelospermum jasminoides*\* (Star Jasmine) – a gentle climber with white, delicately scented flowers. It can also be used as a groundcover.

*Wisteria sinensis*\* (Chinese Wisteria) – this cold-climate plant is wonderful for covering large pergolas. Its grape-like bunches of purple and lilac flowers are an absolute show in summer.

\* Exotic species